

John 15: 9-17
9, 2021

“Love is the Question and the Answer”

May

Mothers’ Day

One of my favorite singers today is Jason Mraz. He has a few songs on the soundtrack for the movie “Kiss the Ground”, which several from our church watched this past month for Earth Day. One of my favorite songs of his is called “Love is Still the Answer,” and it begins like this: “The question is Why? Why are we here? To say our hellos and goodbyes, then disappear? This beautiful life, what is it for? To Learn how to master peace or to master war?” The chorus says, “There’s only one answer that matters; even if your heart has been shattered. Whatever you want, whatever you are after, Love is still the answer; Love is still the answer...” Mraz’s last verse and chorus is: “The question I’ll ask at the end of my days is: What did I give and what will I take... There’s only one answer that matters... Whatever you want, whatever you are after, Love is still the answer. Love is still the answer.”

Jesus would agree with this I think, as we have heard his words about living out his love in our lives today. Why are we here? Love is the answer: to know and share God’s love! How do we love? We are to love like Jesus and God. We give love to each other, and we get to take love to our next home with God...

Our Gospel lesson today continues Jesus’ farewell address to his disciples at his Last Supper with them. In fact, it reiterates points Jesus made earlier in chapter 14 of John. Jesus is seeking to reinforce how the disciples are to live out his teaching on loving God and loving neighbor. Last week Pastor Rich shared with us about Jesus’ visual illustration of abiding in Jesus’ and God’s love like branches abide in a vine. We are all connected and draw our nourishment from Jesus the vine. That is how God’s love feeds and sustains us, as we are connected through Christ’s vine to our roots in God’s love. Jesus builds on that image in our text for today, telling us that his goal is for us to know his joy, and that as we abide or remain in his love, we know this joy. Jesus calls us his friends, who abide in his love and love one another. As his friends, we not only know his joy, but we know his Father, and what his father, our God has taught him. As we love one another like Jesus loved us, we too, will lay down our lives for others, and we will bear fruit for others that lasts. As Jesus’ friends, we carry on his mission with access to God for support through prayer, just as Jesus had as well.

Dr. Gerard Sloyan, commentator on the book of John, notes that Jesus makes quite a game-changing pronouncement in this passage of John, overturning religious and political hierarchies of his day and of all ages with this gift of friendship for his disciples,

friendship with him and through him, with God. Sloyan writes, “it is as if Jesus is saying, “We shall be friends, you and I. No more of this I up here, and you down there, you the object of my affection, and I the object of your veneration. We are both subjects undergoing the passion and pain of love.” Jesus, in these last moments of his earthly life, levels the field of discipleship as he modeled it for the disciples when he their “master” and Rabbi washed their feet before their last supper together. There is no more master and slave! God and Jesus are as close as our breath, and available to walk and work for God’s beloved community, alongside us. We have only to ask, and God is listening; we abide and remain as partners in ministry with them and each other. No longer slaves or servants of God, we are friends, informed and resourced by God and Christ. This is how we inherit Christ’s joy, and share in his Spirit: as we live and share his love and light with others!

Like Jason Mraz sings in David Hodges’ song, “Have it All,” we, when we love like Christ, wish for others to “know the meaning of the word happiness, may they always lead from the beating in their chest; may they be treated like esteemed guests, get to rest, catch their breath...Here’s to the infinite possible ways to love them...” Jesus, in this last speech, is inviting us to join with him and God, in loving the world, all the people in it, our friends and family through Christ; to want and share the best for them, to know Christ’s joy as we celebrate God’s abundant love for them and all of life! This love we share is the greatest, as Pastor Rich told us last week, and this process of sharing that love involves both laying down our lives and bearing fruit that lasts.

Those of you who have mothers and fathers know how this bearing fruit and laying down our lives can play out in our lives. So many times our parents would lay down their lives for us: my parents stayed up late and gave up sleep to be sure we were home safe; they gave up buying new clothes for themselves, to put new clothes on us; they worked extra jobs to cover our college costs...they laid down their lives to make my sisters’ and my lives better. They bore fruit that lasted for us too: setting the example of helping out a colleague in need, bringing new immigrants home for Sunday dinner after church; forgiving us when we made a mistake or forgot a chore; we learned by their example how to bear fruit as people of grace and compassion. I remember so many times when my parents forgave my quick temper, and my impatient remarks...so many times when they stepped in to help me with my chores so I would have more time for homework or extracurricular activities. My parent’s patience and grace were the stuff of legend – with so many others as well! Bearing fruit and laying down our lives; this is how our parents loved us...this is how Jesus and God love us!

Perhaps you can think of others who laid down their lives for you, and bore the fruit of love in your life? Perhaps a grandparent, or teacher, coach or youth pastor? Who by their sacrificial love, represented the love of Christ in your life? This is what Jesus is asking us to do, as well: to lay down our lives for his friends, for our friends, for the family of God united by his love, who abide in God's created world.

One of the memes I've seen scrolling through Facebook reminds us that loving our neighbor is not just a feeling, it is an action, or actions, that actually require laying down our lives, sometimes, and bearing fruit at other times: For example – perhaps some of you are celebrating teachers who are bearing fruit with their students, going beyond their usual work and schedule, to connect with students gone missing in this pandemic; perhaps you know nurses and essential workers who have literally laid down their lives, dying after giving their lives to try and save those dying of covid 19; you may know truckers who have worked overtime to deliver food and other supplies for all of us; you may know police, fire and ambulance drivers who have died, giving their lives to rescue the persons dying from covid... And many of us know grocers, restaurant owners, farmers, business leaders who have figured out new creative ways to bear fruit and meet our needs for living under pandemic restrictions...we have all worked to bear fruit in some ways, and have laid down our lives in other ways, to bring each other this far through the pandemic.

Some are still suffering more than others...persons of color have done more of the difficult work on the frontlines of the pandemic, for low pay, and often without protective gear – whether in the fields harvesting our food, or in the hospitals: cleaning rooms and medical supplies. They have laid down their lives, and their work has borne fruit in our safety and supplies. Can we find ways to reach back now in thanks and support? Can we stand with them for better pay? Can we speak up for better benefits for them? Do we have friends through work or church, at the gym, or where we shop, to whom we can show our appreciation and support, as they still struggle to make ends meet in their lives? How might we bear fruits of love in their lives, and lay down our lives to show Christ's compassion? Jesus and God hold all of us in their love and compassion and ask us to demonstrate their love in our world, with all of our family around the world.

As we stand on the shoulders of Christians gone before: our mothers and fathers, our teachers and friends who have laid down their lives for us, who have borne the fruits of love and grace in our lives, let us give thanks for their faithful witness to Christ's love in our world. Let us follow their example, too, and resolve to live for Jesus as well, witnessing in our words and deeds to Jesus' love that is the question and the answer in

our lives, so that still others may come to know Jesus as their friend. Let us be the love of Christ we want to see in the world, not just in words, but by laying down our lives and bearing fruits of his love and compassion. Therein we will experience the joy of Christ!

Amen.

Rev Lisa Telomen

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Benediction:

In Honor of all who love us, let me share with you this Irish blessing, in which we pass on the blessings of God to others:

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
May the rains fall soft upon your fields

And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Let us go now, to share Christ's joy as we love and serve others with him!

Alleluia! Amen.

Happy Mother's Day today, and Happy Father's Day soon!

Children's Sermon:

I am hoping many of you know this song from the musical, "The Sound of Music,"
It goes like this:

"Raindrops on roses, whiskers on kittens;
bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens.
Brown paper packages tied up with string,
these are a few of my favorite things..."

In our scripture lesson today, Jesus reminds us that the best part of loving others is that it brings us joy when we do so!

So that led me to think about how our favorite things bring us even more joy when we share them with others. You probably know this already!

Here are some of my favorite things: art that my son made me – and I like drawing too; plants that I watch grow, my dogs (and my cat too), brownies that I bake... But you know what, all these things bring me even more joy when I share them with others and can watch others enjoy them too!

You know how you like to share a favorite movie with family or friends, or a favorite ice cream shop with friends? Or a favorite book with your parents?

This is what Jesus tells us – now we all are beloved friends and family with our one God who is parent to us all – and we can share all things with each other as we love one another, like he loves us.

So as we go through this next week, let's watch for ways we can share our favorite things with others, especially let's try to love others who are hurting or sad, and help them to feel loved and feel joy again by sharing a flower, or book or a treat with them. These are some of the many ways we can show our love and share Jesus' joy with others.

Let's pray, as we close our time together:

Thank you, Jesus, for loving us so much, and for sharing your love and joy with us through our Mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers. And thank you for reminding us that you will always be our friend, and that we can be friends and family with everyone around the world. Bless us and help us to share your love and joy with others whom we meet this coming week. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thanks for sharing this time with me! Have fun sharing your favorite things with your mothers and fathers today!