

## Sermon for Sunday May 9, 2021

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John 15:9-17

Ah love! Maybe the Beatles said it best: All you need is love. You can do anything and be anything; all you need is love. Not the romantic, hearts and flowers love, but the caring 'storge'(familial, empathetic love), the philia (brotherly neighborly love) or the agape (divine or godly love).

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives the disciples a commandment "Love one another as I have loved you". He has made them his friends and friends of each other; they are no longer his students or servants. Like him, as John states in today's epistle, they are children of God. And because of this we are all children of God.

He also tells them that greatest love will have you lay down your life for your friends. We see this when he is crucified. Remember how as children, when asked how much we loved someone, we would stretch our arms wide and say "this much". I remember a T-shirt that had "how much does Jesus love you" on the front and a picture of the crucifixion on the back with the words "he stretched his arms this wide for you".

In the early days of the church, this was certainly true, Christians died for their belief and to share the good news of salvation. But what about now? Do we need to throw ourselves in front of a speeding car to save someone, or jump in front of a bullet as a gun is being fired to show love? Do we have to sacrifice and die to show love? Maybe, but most likely not.

How many of us have changed our lives because we love someone? For example, today is Mother's Day. From the time we know we are pregnant, our lives and even our bodies are no longer ours. We have laid down our life, the life we had as a single being, to nurture and care for another being. And that never changes, even as they grow and mature and become, we hope, independent. As the saying goes, having a child means having a part of your heart running around outside of your body.

What about the other end of the spectrum? When our parents get older and need help, especially if they become ill, because of love we lay down our current life and wants and care for them, even or especially when they are difficult, angry and

demanding. We love them even during this difficult time, although our patience may be running out.

We do this for our siblings, our spouses, for our close friends. We are there during the hard times, the sad times and even the joyful times. We sacrifice our time and energy to help them; we show our love.

We even do this for strangers. We are coming out of what has been a horrible, painful and frightening year. Many of us were lucky, able to stay in isolation, in our homes and still work. Others had to put their lives in danger, not just doctors, nurses and medical personnel, but front-line workers that went out into the public and exposure each day to provide groceries, medicines and almost anything else we needed and might have delivered to our door. Each day they put their lives at risk “laying them down” for the rest of us. All of them showed each and every one of us love.

The disciples did this when Jesus called them. “Leave your life and follow me. We do not know where we will sleep tonight, what or when we will eat, or how our needs will be met, but I will give you another, more abundant life” and they left their homes, families and livings and followed.

But is it really that easy? And how can we love everyone all the time, even our annoying neighbor? How about that stranger or that person who is different from us?

Short answer; it isn't and we don't. Being human and sinful, we do not love or show love all the time. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, he replied “To love your lord God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul” and he added “and love your neighbor as yourself”. All his ministry was about love, care, forgiveness, and hope.

As Christians, we acknowledge that we do not love all the time, that we can be selfish about wanting our own lives, that it seems too hard to move away from where and who we are to love our neighbor or even a stranger.

But the good news is that each week, we can come together and be reminded and shown love again. We confess that we do not always care for our neighbors, ask forgiveness and are once again shown God's love as we share communion. We are filled up again with love and are sent back out with grace to lay down our lives as Jesus has commanded and to share his love.