

John 13:31-35

St. Marks Episcopal Church – May 15, 2022

Easter 5 C - Forgiveness

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I choose the dates of the first couple sermons I developed based on the assigned gospel reading. I wanted to be sure that I had a good chance of developing thoughts that would be meaningful. I stopped doing that and started to select a week that fit my schedule. This worked just fine until this week. Developing this homily was a real struggle for me.

Jesus' direction seems simple enough, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." The direction is, indeed, simple enough. But the action required, not so much.

I don't want to come across to you as a hypocrite. For example: I find it easy enough to love my wife and family and all of you, but I know that I do not love everyone as I love myself. I know that there are some people that I have not forgiven, whatever the slights may have been, and therefore cannot love them as myself. With that being the case, how can I stand here and tell you what the right thing to do is when I can't do it myself?

Then I realized that I can't make this about me and my struggles. We all have things that we must overcome in our pursuit of knowing Jesus and our God. None of us are perfect. There has only been one perfect human and He shed His life on the cross for us. I ask that you go back to the first lesson, verses 17 & 18 of Acts 11. "If God gave them the same gift that he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God? When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life." He has also given that repentance to us and everyone else.

Today's gospel takes place at the last supper and is known as "The Last Discourse". Jesus knows he will not be around much longer and gives his disciples a final commandment to love one another as he has loved them. This commandment is so important that it is a cornerstone of being a Christian. He says, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Today we are inundated with messages about inclusion. It is in movies, on the news, on TV, in books and magazines, to the point of sometimes being overpowering. But is this not what Jesus was telling us to do? To love one another unconditionally? To be accepting and open. To let others into our lives?

Some of you may find it hard to believe, especially since I am standing here in front of you, that I am an introvert by nature. But, I lived and worked in an extroverted world and had to deal with people all day long. Often when I got home, all I wanted to do was to be by myself so I could recharge. And, after five days at work, when the weekend came, it was more of the same. I

closed in on myself. At church I would not have been very welcoming to strangers, because I needed to recharge and get ready for the coming week. Back in the office. With all of those people. Consider that as I relate the following story.

I read about a young man that had just moved into a new town. He did not know much about it, but one day as he was passing by a church, he saw a carving above the door. It said, "I am the way, the truth and the life". This spoke to him so he decided to go to the service on Sunday. There, he was not welcomed. No one spoke to him, or smiled, or offered to shake his hand. He left the service, never to return to another service. Some time later he again had occasion to walk by the church and saw that it was closed and completely boarded up. Draw your own conclusions, but I think that had he and others been welcomed by the people of the church, the story may have ended differently. I probably would have been one of those people in the church. I would have been looking internally and I would not have projected any welcoming feelings to him. But I think and hope that I have changed a little since then.

A few weeks ago, just before the start of Lent, a young couple and their two daughters came into our church. I was very proud of the way our congregation welcomed them and accepted them into our midst. They have not returned to our church since then, but I feel it is not due to a lack of acceptance or welcoming feeling provided to them on that Sunday morning. Had we been able to have our normal get together in the basement after church, I am sure we would have been even more welcoming.

Let's consider how things can spread. Take laughter for example. It can be contagious. Someone laughs and others start to laugh too – sometimes without even knowing what is so funny. Laughter spreads because we are connected to each other. The same can be done with our love and acceptance of others.

I would like to read a short story that Carol, my wife, found and gave to me. It is unknown who the writer of this story is, but to me it is very timely.

An elderly woman got on a bus and sat down. At the next stop, a strong, grumpy young woman climbed up and sat down sharply beside the old woman, hitting her with her numerous bags. When she saw that the elderly woman remained silent, the young woman asked her why she had not complained when she hit her with her bags.

The elderly woman replied with a smile: "There is no need to be rude or discuss something so insignificant, as my trip next to you is so short because I am going to get off at the next stop." This answer deserves to be written in gold letters: "There is no need to discuss something so insignificant, because our journey together is too short."

Each of us must understand that our time in this world is so short, that darkening it with struggles, useless arguments, jealousy, not forgiving others, and discontent is a ridiculous waste of time and energy.

Did someone break your heart? Stay calm. The trip is too short.

Did someone betray you, intimidate, cheat or humiliate you? Relax. Excuse. The trip is too short.
Did someone insult you without reason? Stay calm. Ignore it. The trip is too short.
Did a neighbor make a comment on a chat that you didn't like? Stay calm. Ignore him. Forgive that. The trip is too short.

Whatever the problem someone has brought us, remember that our journey together is too short. No one knows the length of that trip. Nobody knows when it will arrive at its stop. Our trip together is too short.

Let us be respectful, kind and forgive, we will be filled with gratitude and joy after all, our trip together is very short.

By the way, earlier I said there were people I had not forgiven. There were three. I don't know where they all are now, but I have taken the time in my prayers to forgive them and I felt a burden lifted from my soul. You too might want to consider if there are some you might want to forgive. If you can do so, you might also feel some relief.

I would like close by reading together the Peace Prayer of St. Francis which is included in your bulletin.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

O divine master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;

To be understood, as to understand;

To be loved, as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned and

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen