

John 21:1-19
St Mark – May 22, 2022
The Sixth Sunday of Easter
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If you loved me

Jesus speaks of love often. Our scriptures also tell us that his love is to cause us to encourage each other. Encourage each other in the spirit of fellowship and love.

In a recent email exchange, I told a friend that knowing him made me a better person. He responded, “We do that for each other in the church, continue to bring out our better natures in one another.”

It is love for one another that makes that encouragement possible. Not the mushy movie kind of love, but deep, caring, and grounded in the Holy Spirit love.

My grandmother loved me and I’ve loved her for as long as I can remember. My earliest memories of her start when I was about 4-years old. Our love for one another might be better expressed as adoration. We delighted in each other.

She left this earth when I was 29 and in those 29 years that were rooted in love she taught me many things.

When I was about 9 I started to learn how to play the violin. She listened to me for many hours while I was learning, always telling me that she enjoyed my playing. If you have ever heard someone learning to play the violin, you know it’s no picnic, but she enjoyed my efforts. When I began to play the cello she encouraged me in the same way.

She would tell me about her younger years learning to play the piano and accompanying her father, an accomplished violinist. She promised that we would play together if I stuck with my practicing and we did.

My grandmother taught me to never give up. That I could do more than I imagined and she taught me about encouragement. That it is not only words that are important, but actions that are most meaningful.

Jesus is looking for our actions when he says, “Those who love me will keep my word.”

Our love for one another will make it obvious that we are Christians. Our patience and forgiveness when our brother or sister falters, makes a mistake, or in some way offends will stand out in a world eager to find fault. Our love for one another will be obvious to an unforgiving world.

My grandmother made great cookies and she let me eat as many as I wanted. As she baked, she told me stories of how she learned about nutrition and why what we eat matters. Her stories were filled with intricate detail and even today I remember many of them.

She'd use the lid of the sugar bowl to make the sugar bowl 'talk' and talk it did. The sugar bowl told me what awful things eating too much sugar does to our bodies. She still made the cookies and I still ate as many as I liked, but along the way I learned the importance of paying attention to what I eat.

Shortly before her death she was still walking at least a mile a day, she remained active and I learned from that too.

Jesus taught us that our bodies are temples, gifts from God, that we should care for our bodies and treasure them.

When I was older my grandmother told me stories of the grandfather I never knew. She told me how intelligent he was and what a good man he was when he wasn't consumed by alcohol. She told me of his abusive and adulterous behavior and about finally divorcing him and how difficult that was for a woman to do at that time.

She taught me about forgiveness. She didn't communicate the hurt, anger, the fear and humiliation she certainly must have felt. From her I learned that life is full of joys and disappointments and that every person makes mistakes, some of them terrible. She taught me that every person needs to be forgiven for something and that by forgiving we are freed from the pain and anger that the actions of others can cause.

She taught me that when we hold onto those painful and angry feelings we hurt ourselves. That we carry a burden, the weight of the past, with us always and that it weighs us down. She taught me that when we forgive that burden is lifted from our shoulders and we go on lighter in spirit. She taught me of the joy that comes when we let the past go and forgive.

She lived the action that Jesus looks for in each of us when he says, "Those who love me will keep my word." By forgiving she too was forgiven.

I learned so much about the best way to live from my grandmother. Most importantly she taught me to cherish and cling to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I learned to take refuge in our Triune God, the three-in-one, and in that too, she taught with stories and love.

When she left this earth I didn't want her to go, but I knew she was ready for the journey and that she longed for it.

When Jesus tells us, "If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I." I remember the pain of my grandmother leaving this life and going to the next, but I also remember the joy she had shared as she often told me how one day she would return to God. I remember the joy I felt that she had finally gone home.

Jesus prepared his disciples for the time he would leave them in body. He promised them an Advocate sent from the Father. A unique gift that would mean far more than they could even imagine. Just as the Holy Spirit that lives in us is impossible for us to completely understand.

When the Father sent us the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus he gave us a spirit that would help us remember, a spirit that would help us hold onto what Jesus taught.

For many years I looked to what I learned from my grandmother as coming from her. What I have come to believe is that those life-giving lessons came to me from God through my grandmother. Much like when Jesus says, "the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me."

I was 'at home' with my grandmother, safe and loved. When Jesus says, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." I get it. Our love for Jesus drives us to keep his word and when we keep his word he sees our love. Not only in our words, but most importantly in our actions.

By keeping his word both the Father and Jesus are drawn closer to us and we thrive with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Whether in this life or in the next God and Jesus are always with us, for they have made their home in each of us.

When Jesus says, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them..." it harkens back to the way this book begins, when we read,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and Word was God.”

Jesus was in the beginning with God and was God. God is Love and the faithfulness of Jesus in keeping and fulfilling the commandments of God is a testament to that love.

Jesus calls us to show, to live into our love for him by being faithful to his word and his teaching. To show our love for him by our love for one another and he reminds us that his word is not really his, but God’s. That if we love him, we love God.

I remember the teaching of my grandmother through the stories she told and what she did when we were together and it is like that with Jesus, but with Jesus we have far more.

When he tells his disciples that he will be leaving them to return to his father he consoles them with the message that we will receive an Advocate, a trusted helper and advisor, to keep us on the right path.

Jesus says to his disciples, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” It is this Advocate that brings the Word through the scriptures to us. It is this Advocate that brings life to the Word today and it is this Advocate that is one with the Father and the Son. For this Advocate is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus goes on to say, “If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.”

When he says, “If you loved me” there is the implication that some of those listening do not love him and we know that is true today. Far too many take the easy road. They do not read, study, and take the word of our Lord into themselves and The Advocate does not live in them.

We hear this “if you loved me” sort of challenge from Jesus more than once. Last week Bill read Jesus’ words when he said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

We see a meaningful example of this in our reading from Acts this morning, when we hear, “The Lord opened Lydia’s heart to eagerly listen to what Paul

said. When she and her household had been baptized she said, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.”

This is Christian community in its early stages. Lydia invited Paul and those with him into her home in an act of Christian fellowship. Worship together is essential if we are to love Jesus and keep his word. Christian fellowship that goes beyond the time we spend together in worship is also essential. This fellowship begins with the time we spend together after we worship or at other times we gather, but it is more than that.

We are to share our lives with one another, to know each other, to forgive each other, to care for one another, and most certainly to pray for one another.

We are to love each other as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.