

Showing our love

What a loaded word “in” is. We are promised that the Paraclete, the advocate, the friend will be in us. The spirit of truth will be in us. Now that made some of the folks at bible study this week a little nervous. Does this thought make you nervous? Why? Stop and think for a moment that we acknowledge this indwelling every Sunday at the very start of our service with the Collect for Purity:

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

We ask for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Inspire, means literally to breathe into us. We are praying for this indwelling of the Spirit, exactly as Jesus promises in today’s passage.

So why does this make some, if not many people squirm a little. The fact is that God knows us intimately whether we acknowledge it or not. The problem for many is that they question whether they are worthy of that great love. I have heard so many say something to the effect of, “well when I get right with God or Jesus, then I will come back to church or do this or that.” That is sort of like saying, “I’ll go to the emergency room once I start to feel better.”

The problem is not in whether Jesus loves us or if we love Jesus, but in our ability to accept that Jesus loves us unconditionally. Then we are called to respond to that love. This is not about us approaching God first, but responding to the love that God already has for us, pours into us. The response is what the beginning of this passage is about.

If you love me you will keep these. It doesn’t say to earn my love you must do these. Nowhere in this passage is God’s love conditional, it is our response that is the issue.

What a radically image of God this is from the culture of the time of John’s community. The gods of the Greeks and Romans were very humanlike in the way they treated each other and the human race.

The gods of ancient Rome were often cruel and capricious. They tested humanity, played with them destroyed them on a mere whim. One of the dangers of being a Christian and not worshipping the gods of Rome is that when disaster struck the Christians were often blamed because they would not offer proper worship in the eyes of Rome.

This image of a loving God was very different from anything that they had experienced. Even to some extent the image of God within those who had a

Jewish background was one of God who punished his people for their unfaithfulness. This was an image of God to be feared. To a large extent I find this is still the image of God of many people in the world. Think of the impact of the recent discussion of the rapture, where the good are saved and the evil totally punished. I find so many people are afraid of God rather than embracing the loving God that Jesus takes such pains to teach in this final discourse of John. He is leaving and what is on his mind, to be sure that this image of a loving God is what his disciples will learn and will then emulate.

If you love me you will keep my commandments. The Message translates this as “do what I have taught you to do”. What are these teachings of Jesus that we are to do to show our love?

Jesus had taught these during his life. The great commandment is from Jewish tradition and in short says Love God and Love your neighbor. The love God with all your heart, will all your mind and with all your strength is the Shema from Deuteronomy. Love your neighbor as yourself comes directly from Leviticus.

John in particular has Jesus give us a new commandment in this final discourse. Love each other as I have loved you. How did Jesus love his disciples? Exactly like he loved everyone including the tax collectors and prostitutes. He listened to them, ministered to them, called them to a new way of being.

We are all happy to be Christians when that means we will be saved and have our ticket to a room in the father’s mansion that we talked about last week, but to have to live here on earth living out the gospel as Jesus commanded, well that’s a little more of a challenge. We are all happy to be Christians until we are called to move out of our comfort zone and do something about the injustice and oppression in this world. When called to truly follow Jesus’ teachings many today say, no thanks, it is too hard. The sacrifice is too great.

Living life as a Christian was never and has never been easy. I am not talking about the act of going to church and celebrating Christmas, Easter and all of our great holidays. There is an old saying that states, “Sitting in church does not make you a Christian anymore than sitting in your garage makes you a car.” The surface acts of Christianity do not involve much challenge, but living out the promises made at our baptisms and that we will hear again next week as we have Bishop Light with us for Confirmation, that is another matter.

St. Francis understood just how hard this was and the challenge is expressed in the closing blessing that I use every week.

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of

people, so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Truly living this blessing is hard work, but we can do it with God's help.

Speaking of sacrifice, later in this several chapter long final discourse Jesus will say these words "John 15:13 "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." On this Memorial Day Weekend we remember those who have lived this commandment. For those men and women past and present who have done this for their friends, their country and for the welfare of the entire world we give thanks.

So I leave you with some challenging questions to pray about this week:

How is Jesus present within you today? How do you experience the risen Christ? How do you allow the love Christ has for you fill your life. How do you live out his command to show your love for him, by doing what he has told you to do?