

Our gospel lesson from John locates us with Jesus on his last night with his beloved disciples. They have shared a meal, he has washed their feet, and now, he takes this opportunity to speak of things that matter: to speak of Love and Friendship.

The most precious of gifts shared between God and Jesus, it is this love that binds us to Christ, to the Holy One and to one another. Theologian Henri Nouwen said of love and friendship:

Dare to love and be a real friend. The love you give and receive is a reality that will lead you closer and closer to God as well as to those whom God has given you to love."

Christ speaks to his disciples first of love - reminding them that "Just as the Father has loved me, "so have I loved you." It's all about love, and it's always been about love. God's love for creation and humanity, God's love expressed in the person of Jesus; Jesus' love for all people: family & friends, sinners and outcasts. Every action, every prayer, every word has been about love. And now, in these final moments with his disciples, he gives a commandment. And it's all about love.

Love one another as I have loved you.

What comes to mind when you hear the word love? Maybe you think about the love you have received, or given? Or perhaps the word love brings discomfort —times when you've longed for love but not found it, times when you've struggled to love, or the sadness of love lost. Contrary to what popular culture might say, Love is not always an easy or sweet feeling that rises up among people who like each other. Often we struggle to love, or even to allow ourselves to be loved. And maybe it is into this human condition that Jesus speaks of love, not only professing his love for us, but commanding us to love. He knows our struggles and our challenges. He knows that when we find it hard to accept someone and the things they have or haven't done, we may wish to withhold our love, especially if we feel hurt. Not only do we deny them our love, but as a result, we deny ourselves the gift of loving. He never said love would be easy — in fact, to love as Jesus loved us, to extend ourselves like him, in true, selfless and compassionate love to others, demands much of us. And it is worth it. Because only true love, like the love between Jesus and the Father, and between Jesus and us has the power to transform, redeem and make us whole.

The sitcom *Friends*, which aired for 12 years, told the stories of six friends living in NYC as they navigated the challenges and joys of friendship. While much of the storyline was comedic and

oftentimes plain silly, we could relate because it mirrored our lives.. In one moment the friends experienced frustration and irritation with one another, and in the next, love showed up in profound ways as they accompanied one another through times of difficulty, sorrow and heartbreak. Somehow, they always had one another's back, and always found their way back in the center of their friendships, the place where love was to be found. And I wonder, if that is what Jesus imagined when he called us friends, and commanded us to love one another, in friendship, like he loved us?

Along their shared journey, the relationship between Jesus and his disciples was always one of love, which transformed and grew into deep and abiding friendship. Like them, when we claim and hold Christ's love for us within, as the gift it is, we come to know the joy of true friendship.

Author James Baldwin said of love:

*The longer I live, the more deeply I learn that **love**, whether we call it friendship or family or romance, **is the work of mirroring and magnifying each other's light.***

Think about it. Love is at the center of Jesus' life — in his relationship with God and with his disciples. His whole ministry is about mirroring and magnifying God's love, so that the world might see it, and be drawn to it. In those he most cherishes, including every one of us, Jesus sees the beauty and goodness of God, As his disciples, we are called to mirror and magnify his love, and to shine his light into the world — in love and friendship. Today, he has commanded us to do the work of love.

"Love is active. And it is work. And each of us is called to partake in this beloved and holy work of God."

To love one another as Jesus loved us, as a friend, is not only to receive and embody the love of God in Christ, but also to be people who strive actively to share that love. This is how we begin to shine the light of Christ into the world — how we share with generosity and intention the love seeded in us by Jesus.

Certainly loving as Christ loved us is not easy, and we won't always get it right. But ultimately, Love makes all the difference.

There is the song, "they will know we are Christians by our love", and perhaps no truer words have been sung. How the world sees and experiences us individually and as members of this community of faith is less about our building, our traditions or how we worship. While each of these, and more, help to shape and form who we are at St. Dunstan's, our FIRST call is to love, to practice being a community committed to doing the hard work of sacrificial and

indiscriminate love. People recognize authentic love when they see it. Such love is what drew so many to Christ then, and still does.

St. Paul in 1st Corinthians 13 spoke of the necessity of love, and helps us to better understand what it is to love like Jesus:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

At the end of the day, Love is Everything. Jesus understood what it was to be human. He knew how easy it was for us to lose sight of love — to become caught up in our selfish desires, to convince ourselves that we've done enough. He knew of our propensity to become complacent, self-consumed, and how quickly we can put our desires before others. He watched and witnessed as temple leaders became more vested in rules and rituals than in the well-being of the people they were there to serve. It is a trap that one can fall into easily.

And if we succumb, if we lose sight of our call to love as he loved us, it will be evident. People will see right through us. They know when love is genuine and authentic. If we practice being a community who loves like Jesus commands, God's light will shine brightly through us. If we fail to do so, folks will leave, or never return. No love is enough to keep people from wanting to come here at all.

So, What if we could embrace and trust in the simplicity of Jesus' call to love? Love like that of Jesus is on display each time we show up, pay attention, or just listen. True love is expressed in how we honor and acknowledge others, how we extend welcome and hospitality, in how we choose to share with and support others. It is, perhaps, best expressed in friendship. When we create space for one another to be seen and known and loved, love is magnified. When we risk extending ourselves in love, in being people upon whom others can depend, we will find God walking alongside us, reminding us that we are never alone.

Friendship is the gift we all need, and the gift we are all called to share.

In the movie Toy Story, Cowboy Woody is Andy's trusted friend, sharing every moment, every present, and one of the best expressions of true love in friendship found in our contemporary culture.

I imagine that if Jesus were sitting right here, talking with us today, he would say something like the Gospel according to Woody.

Easter VI - Sermon
John 15:9-17;

The Rev. Laurel Coote
You've Got a Friend in Me

And Jesus said,

You've got a friend in me.
You've got a friend in me
When the road looks rough ahead,
And you're miles and miles
From your nice warm bed
You just remember what your old pal said
you've got a friend in me.

You've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me
If you've got troubles, I've got 'em too.
There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you.
We stick together and can see it through
Cause you've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me

Some other folks might seem
A little bit smarter than I am
Bigger and stronger too.
Maybe,
But none of them will ever love you
The way I do, it's me and you.
And as the years go by
Our friendship will never die
You're gonna see it's our destiny

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