

Easter 4 B  
St. John 10:11-18  
1 John 3:16-24  
April 22nd, 2018  
St. George's Bolton  
Fr. Chris

## A Love for Creation

"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

Love is more than high, poetic, romantic sounding words. John says that love is truth in action.

If you say you love someone, that love is proven not just in word but in deeds, in the actions you take. If you love someone, you listen to them. If you love someone, you care about and for them and for their wellbeing. If you love someone, you will go the extra mile to meet their needs. If you love someone, you put them ahead of or before yourself.

In the popular musical, Carousel, notice how Billy the Carousel Barker values his words in the song from that musical: "If I loved you, Time and again I would try to say, All I'd want you to know. If I loved you, Words wouldn't come in an easy way; Round in circles I'd go! Longin' to tell you, But afraid and shy, I'd let my golden chances pass me by! Soon you'd leave me, Off you would go in the mist of day, Never, never to know how I loved you..." The words don't come easily for Billy, whose other words flow easily out of his mouth as a public speaker in a traveling carnival. While it is easy to pay lip service to love, it is not so easy when you mean it. The heart, the intentions, the actions must manifest that love.

Christians are called to be lovers. John says, "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."

John 13:35: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Loving others is what we are supposed to be about. Loving others means treating them as you would wish to be treated yourself. Loving others makes us alive in the world, and being alive, we are aware of our intimate

connections with others and the world in which we live. By this they will know you are my disciples, if you love one another...

Love for creation. If we love God's creation, what would that look like? If in words you say you love the beach and the woods, and all of the beautiful creation, then how does that love get translated into deeds?

How would you treat someone you love? Would you take advantage of them? Would you use them for your own advantage? Would you ignore their cries for help? Would you smoke half a pack of cigarettes while across from them in a nice restaurant, as the smoke enveloped them and your fellow diners? Would you hurt them by exposing them to chemicals which could harm their health? When you visited with them, would you pepper their house with your trash, leaving gum wrappers and cigarette butts all over their living room carpet? Would you walk across their lovely kitchen floor with your muddy boots, scuffing the nice finish? Would you change the oil from your car in their driveway, or better yet, on their lawn so you could crawl under it to unloosen the oil pan bolt, and then let the contents drip out into their soil? 'No one will see it-it will get absorbed into the earth...that's where oil comes from,' you say to yourself as if to comfort your conscience. What nobody sees will not hurt them.

I doubt anyone with half a brain would treat anyone this way, let alone someone they truly loved this way. And yet, with hardly a thought, many treat our Mother Earth, God's gift to each one of us, this way. They see her as a thing to be used for our furtherance. They see her as ripe to be used and abused. They see her as belonging mainly to them, and not their fellow travelers on this earth and the generations which come after us.

What nobody sees will not hurt them. This has long been a mantra for the environment, thinking that the earth is so big, any consequences from our actions will be minor or small. "The earth is an unlimited bank of resources for man to use." But we learned differently after the manned-flight space program sent back photos of the earth floating in a sea of blackness taken from the vantage point of the moon as they orbited that orb. We could see our limits and our small, fragile island home, vulnerably floating around in outer space, and how interdependent we are upon one another. There were no geographical or national boundaries on this globe. This is the new metaphor for God's creation: the new Icon which celebrates the words of the first book of the Bible.

We are stewards of this trust temporarily entrusted to us. Yet some have taken the words of Genesis to subdue the earth to mean to conquer, ravage and destroy it for

their personal purposes. Genesis 1:28 gives us dominion over the earth, to rule it, and yes, subdue it: "God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." We are to be benign rulers, created in the image of a loving God, not destructive abusive devils. We are to be like the Good shepherd in the Gospel passage this morning, not a sheep tender who leaves their flock to be devoured by wolves.

If you love God and are thankful for the gifts God blesses us with, why would you treat them this way? When you receive a gift from someone you love, and who loves you, do you not honor the gift and take extra care of it? Do you not cherish the emblem of the kindness you have received? Would any of us be so callous as to reject the gift or treat it with contempt or ambivalence? I don't think so, and especially not someone who claimed to love God.

When I look at creation, I see God. Creation is not God, but it is somewhere that God has walked. It is a place to encounter the things which God has carefully created to make our island home. It is a place where you can feel close to God, without the complicating distractions of humankind's creations. To me, walking in the woods is like walking in a great cathedral. It is a holy place that inspires reverence for the presence of God all around you. To me, walking in nature we can observe the complexities of creation which more than suggest it is no accident that they came into being this way. As I walk by the edge of the ocean I am struck by the power of God as the tide laps the shore, and as I gaze out to the horizon far away, it is like looking into God's face, which is infinite and goes on beyond my vision. Who would even glance at such beauty and throw a water bottle or soda can at it?

The Apostle John asks us, "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" Our sister creation is in need. Our brother earth is crying out for help and relief. How can we ignore their pleas? How can we allow them to fall on deaf ears? What kind of shepherds will we be? AMEN