

Easter 5C
St. John 13:31-35
April 24, 2016
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Love

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Sometimes it is not so easy to love. It is downright hard!

It is easier to love things, as they don't seem to change the way people do. They are static. It's easy to say I love these clothes or I love this car. People, however, well they're harder to love.

Our love affair with things is temporary, until they grow old or become lost. And things age quickly, usually quicker than we do. Imagine how many cars you have owned in your life. Most people will own between 10 and 12 cars in a lifetime. Remember how much you loved that car when it was brand new to you? When was the last time you gave it an affectionate thought? When was the last time you even gave it a thought? As they age, we often start to regret the transitory nature of our stuff when they begin to fail us.

While we can love things, unfortunately, they cannot return the favor. All the things in the world do not lead to love. On the contrary, love of things is not what life is about. Love of things will leave you lonely and wanting. Hoard as many things as you wish, and you are still lonely in the end. No amount of stuff can fill the

void we feel inside us, the emptiness. That void can only be filled with love.

You can love ideas. They have their appeal. With a love affair with an idea, you can remain in your head and not involve any risky emotions, and still feel passionate about something. The head helps keep emotion in check and controls the more unpredictable heart, keeping it from making us take risks we are fearful of taking. It's hard to imagine ideas failing you, but thinking does get old, and memory plays its tricks with us. In the end, like the love affair with things, you may find yourself coming up empty.

You can love religion and even claim great faith. You can be a regular in church and have your name on a plaque, and be a leader in the congregation. However, if you lack the ability to love from your heart, freely, unbound, without limit, as St. Paul said [*in First Corinthians 13*], your religion is in vain. That is because the love of God is at the heart of our religion, as is the love of your fellow human beings. I wonder how you can be "religious" and miss the heart of religion that calls us to be lovers.

I have often referred to failed mission work as resembling a "Bank of England" mentality for us Episcopalians. By that I mean the willingness to let the dollar do it instead of using our own hands. It is easy to send dollars to worthy causes. No doubt, sending money in the name of mission helps many people. Yet, when we ignore the targets of these dollars, the intended recipients of our largess, we are little different from the Wall Street Bankers and moguls who are the favorite targets and punching bags these days of our indignation and judgment. We are separated from people. We have no opportunity to love them. Giving money is only a small part of love. Giving of yourself is the key, and even when you give yourself, it must be with love and in

love. Love the poor and the sick. Hate disease and the causes of poverty. Do not hate people. Love your enemies and those who differ from you. By this we as Christians distinguish ourselves from others.

What is love? We can turn to St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, the famous chapter 13, which we often associate with romantic love and weddings, but which addresses itself more basically to Christian love, the sort we all should be emulating.

He says:

- Love is patient. Whether you are trying to love someone else or simply love yourself, you must be patient. We are often impatient with ourselves, and cut ourselves no slack whatsoever. It is here we must learn patience first. If we can be patient with ourselves, we can apply this patience with others. Be patient with me: God isn't finished with me yet. I am a work in progress. Give others the same grace of time you have been given by God.
- Love is kind. Love is also generous. Love is focused on the other, seeking opportunities for generosity and giving of ourselves. Kind is gentle, benevolent, seeking the good for others. Kind is also a striving for their happiness. Kind is another word for loving.
- Love rejoices in the truth. Love always tells the truth, even when they are hard truths. Your best friends, your family members, your spouse should always tell you the truth in as kind and gentle a way as possible, so that you may hear it, and likewise, we must do so for others.
- Love trusts and believes all things. Love is no cynic. Love believes in the possibility of change. Love trusts other human beings until proven otherwise, and even then, we Christians, perhaps the world would say, "foolishly," trust in the better nature, better angels of all human kind. I have

found you can always find some good in almost everyone, and if you haven't found it, you haven't looked hard enough. Honor that treasure of goodness in others, for there is the presence of God.

- Love hopes. Love never looks on another human being as hopeless or unlovable, but rather finds reason to love and reason to hope for them, no matter how dire the situation, and no matter how intransigent a miscreant might be, or how much they might lack insight into what they need to do. No one is found hopeless in love. But we should be hopelessly in love with others.
- Love perseveres and endures. Love does not disappear with hardship, but is tested by hardship and is not found wanting, but rather is strengthened. Love does not take flight when ugliness and woundedness and faults are uncovered, but rather finds human commonality. Endurance is borne up by empathy, in which we discover that there, but for the Grace of God, go I. Therefore, I reach out in love because I have been loved by God and someday hope to be loved by others when I need to be loved.
- Love is blind, like justice is supposed to be. We are called not only to love those who love us, but to love all humankind. We are specifically asked to love the unlovable and those who are different from us. By this, others will know that we are the disciples of Christ. It is too easy to let our prejudices get in the way.
- Paul writes about love mostly in the negative in chapter 13 of I Corinthians, did you ever notice? *Here are some of the things he posits about love in the negative:* Love lacks envy. Love is not jealous, but rejoices in the good fortune of others. Love is not proud. Love does not boast. We love for love's own sake, not to be praised for our acts of love or for the people we keep company with, as though their presence

redeemed us and our sorry state. Love is not self-seeking. Love always seeks the best for the other. Love is not arrogant. Love is not rude. Love does not dishonor others. Love does not use others. Love is not easily angered. Love is not irritable or resentful. Love does not insist on its own way. Love keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not rejoice in the failure of others. These are also the ways we shall know love: by the absence of these attributes in our conduct and that of others. Real lovers do not do these things, because, well, doing these things is not loving.

Sometimes it is even hard to love those who love you. Or should I add, those who are *supposed* to love you? We must love even when the love is not returned. We must love even when it seems crazy to do so. We must love them when they hurt and disappoint us. Love doesn't fail. People do. I have failed myself and others plenty in my life, but I strive not to fail to love.

Love one another. This is the clear commandment of God. It is easy to love those who love you. It is hard to love the unlovable or those who really differ from you. Learn to love from Jesus. He is the best teacher. The greatest love Jesus demonstrates is *self giving love*. God loves us despite the betrayals and rejections of God's love that we engage in. God loves us because we are God's creatures. This is the crazy, hard to believe but true love of God. If you want to know how to love, study Jesus. If you want to know how to love, read the bible. Jesus teaches us how to love and shows us by doing what he teaches. He puts his words into action.

Jesus tells us to love one another as he has loved us. How does Jesus love? Jesus is always focused on the other and what the other needs. Jesus loves with compassion. Jesus loves with empathy. He has walked in our shoes. God understands what we struggle with. This is not a detached God up in the sky who hasn't

a clue about the human experience. This is God come down to earth, to live as we live.

Love one another. Life is all about love. That's what we really need to remember and focus on everyday. Love God. Love others. Love yourself. As St. Paul said, the greatest of the Christian virtues is Love. AMEN