

May 9, 2021
6th Sunday of Easter
John 15: 9-17

Jesus said to his disciples: 9 "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. 12 This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. 16 It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. 17 This I command you: love one another."



Background

In last Sunday's gospel text, Jesus used the image of a grapevine to describe his relationship with God and the disciples. The gospel for this Sunday follows last week's gospel. Here, the intimate nature of those same relationships is described as *agape* love and is contrasted to the one-sided relationship of the master and slave.

The Greek word for love here is not *eros*, the passionate love that seeks to possess, nor *philia*, the attachment of family relationships. Instead, John uses the word *agape*. This is the only word he uses to describe the love of God, and it is used eight times in this text. Each time, the word is placed in the aorist tense, which means that it refers to a particular act of love. This tense of the verb indicates that John is not referring here to God's timeless ever-present love for us that has been manifested continuously throughout history. The single unique expression of God's love that John is referring to is the Son's obedience to the Father in becoming present in the person of Jesus. John refers to God's call to accept this mission that was heard by Jesus and those present at his baptism. (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22)

God's love, manifested in Jesus' acceptance of his mission of being one among us, is the foundation that characterizes our relationship with God. The focus is not on our love, but on God's invitation to remain in the permanent love of God. That relationship is maintained through obedience to God's commandments. It is also found in the disciple who is willing to lay down his/her life for the other like the Good Shepherd. Faithfully living God's commandments is the way disciples recognize that they are remaining in the relationship to which they have been invited. Like the gospel text from last Sunday, the disciples are reminded that their relationship with God is not just for itself, but it must bear fruit.

While the text does speak of maintaining one's relationship with God by being obedient, it is not by maintaining one's relationship with the Hebrew community that one maintains this relationship with God. Instead, John characterizes this relationship with God as inviting us into a friendship with Jesus. This relationship is not based in being part of a people, but on a more personal relationship that also carries with it a personal willingness to lay down one's life for the other.

This not the responsibility of the community as a whole, but of each individual as they are invited by God to share in this relationship.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of your relationships would characterize as an experience of agape love, philia love, and eros love? What blessings do you think you received from each of those relationships?
2. Do you remember times in your life when you felt chosen? (Perhaps to be part of a team, a role in a drama production, a position of leadership in an organization, etc.) Do you also remember times when you felt passed over?
3. Have you ever felt like you had become an adopted member of a family?
4. Can you recall occasions when you knew that you needed to die to some part of yourself for the wellbeing of another? Do you think of that occasion as an act of love?
5. In the first part of this gospel, Jesus invites the disciples to *remain* in his love. What challenges to remaining in his love were they facing? What challenges do you face?
6. Jesus calls the disciples friends in this gospel text. Can you recall times in the gospels when Jesus treats the disciples as friends? Have there been times when you felt like God was treating you as a friend?
7. Can you take some time now to talk to God about your experience of God's love for you, your desire to respond to God's love for you, or some other thought that arose from you as you read this gospel text?

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