



Easter 5 (B)

How to Love

RCL: Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:24-30; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Let us pray: God of mercy and grace, walk with us. As we celebrate the resurrection of your Son, Jesus, heal our hearts, guide our minds, and lead us to a place of restoration. May we seek spiritual renewal, may our hearts and minds serve you and your Truth, and may we bear fruit in all that we say and do. Amen.

Jesus said to his disciples, “I am the true vine... abide in me as I abide in you.” This Gospel and our lessons today remind us to whom we belong with a clear visual image. These lessons call us into a new and wonderful way of living – a way that welcomes the other, that is not done alone, but in community – a way that starts with Love.

Everyone who loves is born of God. As we continue to celebrate the glorious resurrection of Our Lord, we are called to bear fruit and become disciples because we love – though this isn’t always easy. How can we do this when we are still hurting from this pandemic? How can we do this when the news around us leaves us spiritually and emotionally drained?

How do we proclaim the Good News about Jesus when we think there is just too much happening around us and in the world? The answer is never the same and will vary from person to person. Still, the text, the overall message of this Gospel, suggests this simple response: We show up. We show up authentically as ourselves. We love others. We share the Good News with others. We speak and act in ways that support this message of love.

In our Gospel, Jesus is addressing us. Twice, he says, “I am,” reminding us that God knows our hearts. There is no need to hide from God, no need to hide those parts of ourselves of which we are ashamed, no need to use those ugly parts as excuses to stay away from God. Instead, this truth, this love, draws us nearer to God. It allows us to see those parts we think cannot be restored and instead allows us to run to the Father, allows us to abide in God.

Our epistle reminds us that if we love one another, God lives in us. God abides in us. There is no secret we can keep from God.

But what is love? We could attempt to define it in many ways, and we could provide examples of how we have experienced love, yet it would still not be enough. We could look at our relationships and draw from those, but even then, we would not have a certain definition.

But – we could look to the One who sent Jesus into the world to die for us to create a clear example of love. A different kind of love. This embodied love. This love that liberates. A love that clears our eyes to see the injustices of this world and empowers us to act in ways that seek the well-being of all. A love that makes us curious about systems that oppress.

Now, for some this may be difficult to understand; perhaps a concrete example is needed. Imagine the following: You walk into any nursery or vineyard and there you encounter life. You encounter different individuals caring and tending to the needs of every vine. The vine grower tends to them all, making no exceptions! The vine grower is aware of what each vine needs to bear fruit. The vine grower loves the branches. Similarly, God examines our hearts, provides for us, and can also remove those parts of ourselves that bear no fruit. If the vine grower worries about all the vines and knows that every branch *can* bear fruit, then the pruning becomes a special and necessary part of the growth process. Pruning will change the outcome for the vine, and it will change our outcomes, too.

When we abide in God, we invite God into our lives – however messy that may be. When we abide in God, we are empowered to seek our place in this world, loving others, living into the mission of the Church, restoring all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

It is a slow and transformational relationship between the vine grower and the branches. Just like the Ethiopian eunuch in our first lesson, we will not always understand. We may ask, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” These relationships require honesty and require us to let go of all those parts we think we can hide from the world and God. How many times have we been afraid to ask for help? Or even embarrassed to ask, “Who can guide me?”

If we have learned one thing from this pandemic and the past year, it is that we cannot do this work alone. We have Jesus’ example of love by being in relationship with people. We have Philip’s example of love teaching, sharing about God, and baptizing. We have the disciples’ example of love by following Jesus, even amid their own shortcomings. All of these examples are needed. Our world needs people who are capable of this love because a church that only condemns and only sees sin would not truly be the church. It would not be transformed by grace or mercy. There would be no opportunity for restoring our brokenness.

As God transforms us, we transform the world. Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador knew what it meant to be transformed by love; he knew what it meant to be with the people of his country and knew that speaking the truth would likely cause his death; he knew that loving the people of El Salvador meant that his actions and words mattered. He is reported to have said, “If a man knows how to detach from himself and knows how to love, he is a saint; if a man speaks too much about holiness but does not know how to love, he is no saint.” This is how we love.

When we abide in God, God abides in us. God abides in our relationships. God transforms. God will allow us to bear fruit. Amen.

*This sermon was written by **the Rev. Luz Cabrera Montes**, curate at Trinity Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas.*

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