

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Easter 6 Year B

Acts 10:44-48; Ps. 98; 1 Jn. 5:1-6; Jn. 15:9-17

Tannum 09/05/2021

The story is told of a piano concert that was to be given by twenty-five grand master pianists, all gathered together in one music hall. Twenty-five grand pianos were delivered and a piano tuner was hired to prepare them by tuning them. He worked diligently tuning the first one to perfection using his tuning fork. At that point he was ready for a break. Placing his tuning fork in his pocket he got in his car and went to the local McDonald's for coffee and a muffin. When he returned to the hall he went to the second piano and reached for his tuning fork. It was missing. Somewhere along the way, he had lost it.

He thought for a moment and decided to tune the second piano to the first one knowing he had tuned it so perfectly. Then he tuned the third to the second, the fourth to the third and so on until all twenty-five pianos had been tuned—tuning each one to the previous one tuned. When the master pianists arrived each one played their pieces individually and things were fine.

But for the grand finale, when they were to play in unison using all twenty-five pianos at one time, they struck the first chord and there was in fact discord. You see, only one of the pianos had been tuned relative to the perfect pitch of the tuning fork. The rest were tuned relative to each other—each one at the mercy of the weakness in pitch of the one preceding it. They, of course, needed to be tuned to the same tuning fork for all to have played in perfect pitch.

As part of the human condition we so easily fall into the trap of measuring how well we're doing by comparing ourselves—our problems, our blessings, our good and bad luck—to the person next to us, or across from us. We often say, no matter how bad off we are, there are always those who are worse off. And no matter how good we have it, we always seem to dwell on the fact that somebody else has it better.

Do you ever find yourself doing that kind of measuring in regard to your relationship with God? Do you ever find yourself measuring your own spirituality or your own relationship with God by comparing yourself to others and how you perceive *their*

spirituality or *their* relationship with God to be? It's what you might call the theory of spiritual relativity.

As we consider the passage today from the gospel according to John, we find that John makes no allowance for his kind of spiritual relativity. In our gospel passage for today, Jesus commands us to, **“love one another as I have loved you”**—not to love one another as well as the next person—not to measure your love against how you perceive how someone else loves—not to love one another to the best of your ability—but to love one another “as *I* have loved you.”

If you think about that seriously for a while, you might have cause to be very nervous. What does it mean for us to love one another as Christ has loved us? If we are to obey Christ in this command—if we are to seek to follow his will in this matter of love—we have to understand what it means for us to love one another as Christ loved us. Rather than comparing the measure of love that we show to others with how we see other people exercise love, we have to use Jesus and how he loved, as our definition or rule of thumb of what it means to love one another.

Too often, in the society in which we live, our understanding of love is reduced to a level of mushy sentimentality. When we apply that kind of love to our spiritual lives, what we end up with is a fairy-floss Jesus proclaiming a God whose mushy love is about as strong as a quickly made soufflé on Masterchef. But for Christians who desire to exercise true love for others, that just will not do.

Perhaps, a good place for us to start would be take a kind of snapshot of how Jesus himself expressed love towards those he met while he was alive—and ultimately how he expresses his love towards us, 2000 years later.

How then did Jesus express his love for humanity? (I've listed 10 things, just to keep it a nice round number, but I have no doubt you could find more):

Jesus showed his love for others...

1. by openly challenging corruption and deceit in those who should have known better.

2. by caring for the welfare of those who would have been considered enemies.
3. by giving of himself, with no expectation of being given gratitude, praise or repayment.
4. by forgiving those who set out to do him harm.
5. by turning the other cheek.
6. by confronting, with naked honesty, the hypocrisies of religion.
7. by expressing anger over those who were being exploited.
8. by cleansing the Temple.
9. by healing those who were sick.
10. by embracing the poor and the outcast, and by welcoming sinners.

So, if we are to love others as Jesus has loved us, then we have to take seriously our response to each of these items that I have just listed. This is very much our measuring stick—our tuning fork, if you like.

Do we challenge corruption where we find it?

Do we look out for the welfare of those who are against us?

Do we give of ourselves with no thought of praise or recompense?

Do we forgive those who sin against us?

Do we turn the other cheek when others act against us?

Do we confront hypocrisy, or do we, in fact, in our religiosity, become a part of it?

Do we get angry over the exploitation of others?

Do we cleanse the temple of our own lives—keeping ourselves in close relationship with God?

Do we care for those who are sick?

Do we embrace the poor and the outcast—and do we welcome sinners and in love, seek to restore them to God?

This is not easy. To attempt to fulfil all of those things, will be extremely difficult for each of us. But if that were not difficult enough, there is, in fact, one more way in which Jesus expressed his love for others, and indeed even us, 2000 years later—and it's to this that we now turn.

As we have seen in that list of 10 things—the whole of Jesus' life, in fact, displays his love for us. This love, however, reached its ultimate fulfilment on a wooden cross. There, on

the cross of Calvary, Jesus is crucified—forgiving his enemies and full of compassion for those around him. This is the ultimate expression of love. This is what it means to be Divine. It's also what it means to be fully human. *"This is my commandment: That you love one another as I have loved you."* Jesus' love for us is ultimately expressed sacrificially, on the cross.

For us to love one another as Jesus Christ has loved us, means not only following his example in all those 10 things that I have listed above—and however many other expressions of love there may be—it means ultimately, to sacrifice yourself for one another—to lay down your life for one another—for *that* is how Jesus ultimately loved us.

How do we do that here in Gladstone, in the year 2012? How do we express the sacrifice for one another that true love demands? —for ultimately, those 10 items listed, are all encompassed by that one action of sacrifice—and ultimately, that's the one thing that we need to be concentrating on. Get that right and the other 10 things fall into place.

In Jesus—in his life and in his death—we have been given a concrete example of how we are to love one another. Our love for one another, then, must also be shown by concrete example—both in *our* life and in *our* death—our death of self—of the passions that drive us down—of the bitterness and resentment that builds up inside of us—of our unforgiveness and rebellion.

It's not enough to *say* that you love one another—you must demonstrate that love. We do that in our attitudes towards one another, in acts of service towards one another and through sacrificing ourselves for the sake of others—sacrificing our wants—sacrificing our needs—sacrificing our freedom—sacrificing even, at times, our bodies.

The only way we can do that is through the Holy Spirit who works within us—guiding us, moulding us and conforming us into the likeness of Christ—for that, ultimately, is what the Holy spirit strives for in us. May we be open to the Spirit's guiding as we seek to love one another as Jesus Christ loved us?

To him be all the glory, honour and praise. Amen.