

Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 9, 2021, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: John 15:9-17

"A Special Kind of Love"

Today is one of those very special days of the year in which we honor mothers everywhere – and there is no doubt that they all deserve to be honored – as do all women. Thank you Mom's – thank you ladies – you are all a true blessing and we do salute you!

In today's Holy Gospel of John, that takes place on the night that Jesus was arrested and taken into captivity, Our Lord said *"You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* The fact that Jesus would call us His friends somehow defies the imagination. Reading Romans 5:6-8 shows us again just how special we are to Jesus. St. Paul writes, *"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man, though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* And yet, the Bible's most famous and most potent scripture: John 3:16 tell us *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that those who believe in him may not perish but may have eternal life."* It has said it before that this is serious – this was a truly personal gift that Jesus, willingly, gave to you! And only you can choose to accept it or not. It is by far the greatest treasure any of us will ever receive – from the best friend you could ever hope to have. I just had to look at the original Greek and the verb used here for love is the verb 'agapaow' **ἀγαπάω** – and that kind of love is unconditional – like a mother's love, and just as interesting is the word for world, which is kosmos **κόσμος**. We, through people like astronomer Carl Sagan have taken that word to mean much more - even to mean the universe. I think that is even more so – since God loves every part of His creation, no matter how we mess up, just as every mother loves each of her children. The agape -or unconditional love that a mother has for her children is just like that special love that God has for us.

Jesus never considered His disciples as servants or slaves – who simply get ordered around, but instead He was sharing - with those He loves, His friends – and ultimately with us, His hopes, and His plans. Jesus has shared with them everything He heard from His Father, and we can see the disciples fulfilling the ideal of Abraham and Moses.

John 15:13 records Jesus telling us: *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."* We know that the next day – Jesus would do so, by willingly laying upon the cross. There is no greater love that we can show to one another than to sacrifice for them.

In John 15:16, Jesus said, *"You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last"* My dear friends, this is also very personal, because Jesus gives us an indication of just how important we are to Him, and this is not by chance. Jesus, in effect is saying that, "you belong to Me." He is your friend. He chose you! Here Jesus is reminding us that the Lord of the Universe thinks that each of us here are so precious and so

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special that He considers us not only family – but dear ‘chosen’ friends. We all know that you cannot choose your relatives, but you can choose your friends! Jesus chose willingly to take our place and our punishment, because He loves us unconditionally, and wants to spend eternity with us. And that is why He gave Himself for us.

In choosing us, God chose to give us life – eternal life - with Him. That is why the resurrection naturally follows Christ’s crucifixion. God could have said... "Oh, I think I’ll wait till the end of time to raise Jesus from the dead," but He did not. In His Resurrection, Jesus provided the hope to all mankind that He is just who He says He is, and that - His Word is the Truth. Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord in our lives means that we too will rise again – if we recognize that we are sinners in need of forgiveness, and ask Jesus to transform us to be more like Him – that is all we need to do.

You have heard me say several times before in sermons: God loves you just the way you are --- but He loves you too much to leave you that way. Friends do not force themselves on one another because forcing yourself on another is not friendship at all. God would never force Himself upon anyone – and that is why He gives us the choice to respond to His choosing of us – to be His friend – to be in relationship with Him, to be His church – the Bride of Christ. True love is beautiful. It is not forced; it follows God’s plan from the very beginning of time as we have read in the Scriptures. True love means recognizing our sins – and that those sins can separate us from our Lord. Your response is up to you - to repent or not! This brings to mind one of my favorite Scriptures – Revelation 3:20 which goes along with an awesome image. A painting of Jesus Christ standing outside a door – that contains no handle. Jesus says, "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*" We need to invite Him in! It does not mean that Jesus could not just walk through the door – but He will not – He is the ultimate gentleman. We know that He could walk through doors – just look at John 20.

Please listen once again to these words from today’s Holy Gospel in which Jesus said, "*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*" (John 15:12-15) The obedience that Jesus displayed going to the cross is the example for us to follow as we strive to follow and obey what Jesus asks of us. That means that we are not just to study and learn the Gospel – but out of grateful obedience, we are to incorporate what it says into our daily lives, into our very being. We are not just to talk the talk – but we need to walk the walk - to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is no act we can do that could possibly impress others as much as the gift of self - the ministry of presence, being there for people. A touch of the shoulder, a prayer for someone, a smile, and no other kind of act will bring others to the Cross of Christ - who sacrificed Himself

for each one of us.

Jesus wants each one of us to respond to the shining example that His disciples have laid out for us – which we can see fully evidenced throughout the entire Book of the Acts of the Apostles. These men were firsthand eyewitnesses of Jesus' love demonstrated by His healings, His preaching, His teaching, His miracles, His death on the cross, His Resurrection, and His compassion for all of those He loved.

Our relationship with Jesus is one of love, loyalty, and obedience – grateful obedience – to the One who has loved us more than we could possibly begin to imagine. The test of that love, loyalty, and obedience remains the simple, profound, dangerous, and difficult command: “*love one another as I have loved you.*” That indeed is a special kind of love!