

Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 10, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 15:9-17

“Love One Another”

Today is a day in which we honor mothers everywhere – and they do indeed deserve every honor for all of the hard work that they do and have done – simply out of love. It is truly amazing when you think that one day a woman becomes a mother – in many ways. It could be by giving birth, it could be through adoption, it could be by marrying someone who has children. Any way you look at it – a marvelous transformation takes place – and suddenly a woman is a mother. I want to suggest to you that today is a day in which we should honor ALL women – for the precious role that they play in the world – some women are both mother and father to their children, some women do not have children, but have provided a role model for children as teachers, community leaders, or other positions of trust. Thank you Mom's – thank you ladies – you are all a true blessing and we salute you!

Isn't it ironic that God Himself is referred to as “mother nature” when He instead should be honored and called the “Creator.” We sometimes get mixed up with how we use labels and words. For example:

- * I wonder why it's such a compliment to tell a woman that she looks like “a breath of spring,” but it's not to tell her she looks like “the end of hard winter.” After all, isn't it the same thing?
- * I wonder why it gives a woman such joy when you tell her that “time stands still when you look into her face,” -- but not to say that “her face would stop a clock.” Why?
- * I wonder why people who punish a child for lying will invariably tell that same child, when the phone rings: "Just say I'm not home."
- * I wonder why, when the preacher says, "In closing..." he doesn't.
- * I wonder why a speaker who "needs no introduction" is going to get one anyway.

It all seems very curious to me!

There are many things in this world that can cause us to wonder. But one of the most incredible is that God Himself would want to call us His friends.

In today's Holy Gospel in John 15:14-15 Jesus 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. One of the biggest reasons it is difficult to imagine is because of what we find written in Romans 5:6-8 *"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, Bible's most famous and most potent scripture: John 3:16 tell us *"For God so... (pause and ask --what?) (loved the world). That's you and me! "For God so loved **me** that he gave his only Son, so that **I**, who believe in him may not perish but may have eternal life."* Have you ever thought of this Scripture in this way? This is serious – this

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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.

We need to understand the context of where and why Jesus is saying these things to His disciples. These very words were spoken by Jesus on the night before His death and crucifixion – in the upper room. Jesus never considered His disciples as 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. The Greek word for friend – φίλοι (*filoi*) – is closely related to the verb for love - φιλέω (*fileo*) – (you may know that as the city of brotherly love – Philadelphia) and it delivers a greater sense of intimacy than our modern day word for friend. Jesus has shared with them everything He heard from His Father, and we can see the disciples fulfilling the ideal of Abraham and Moses. Abraham was called God’s friend – and God shared His plans for Sodom and Gomorrah with him. Moses also was God’s friend – and He like the disciples, would speak face to face with God. All that belongs to the Father belongs to Jesus and He has passed it all on to His disciples – His friends. There is nothing more to be known about the Father apart from Jesus and His resurrection. Jesus said it Himself; He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life – and through Him – His followers – His friends will bear much fruit – thereby bringing Glory to the Father!

John 15:13 tells us: *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."* The symbol of the cross is so important to our relationships that God even used it for marriage: Ephesians 5:25 *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."* There is no greater love that we can show to one another than to sacrifice for them.

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"* Think of the significance - you are not here today because it is Mother’s Day, or it is the thing to do on a Sunday morning, you are here today because God spoke to you – to your inner being, to your spirit, and said “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 special that He considers us not only family – but dear chosen friends. We all know that you can’t choose your relatives, but you can choose your friends. Jesus chose of His own free will to step up and take our place and our punishment. He chooses us because He loves us – 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’s 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 didn’t. 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 Him as Lord in our lives means that we too will rise again –

If we recognize that we are sinners and ask Him 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 don't force themselves on one another – for 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 beginning of time as we read in the Scriptures. True love means recognizing our sins – and that those sins can separate us from our Lord. What is our response? That my friends is our choice- to repent or not! This brings to mind one of my favorite Scriptures – Revelation 3:20 which goes along with an awesome painting. A painting of Jesus Christ standing outside a door – that contains no handle. (Revelation 3:20 NIV) *"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 doesn't mean that Jesus couldn't just walk through the door – but He won't – He is a gentleman.

Noted British Anglican C.S. Lewis defined friendship as this: "Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, "What! You too? I thought I was the only one."

A friend is one who knows their own short comings. You see, there were these two men who were out hunting in the northern part of the U.S. Suddenly one man yelled and the other looked up to see a big old grizzly bear charging toward them. The first man started to frantically put on his tennis shoes and his friend anxiously asked, "What are you doing? Don't you know you can't outrun a grizzly bear?" He calmly replied "I don't have to outrun a grizzly. I just have to outrun you!"

The Cross is the symbol of what Jesus desires of us. Listen to these words from today's Gospel:

John 15:12 *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*

John 15:14 *"You are my friends if you do what I command you."*

John 15:17 *"I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."*

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 we are to integrate what it says into our daily lives, into our very being. We don't just talk the talk – but we are to walk the walk - to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is no act we can do that can impress others as much as the gift of self. 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

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Apostles. They were first hand eye witnesses of Jesus' love evidenced by His healings, His preaching, His miracles, His death on the cross, and His compassion for all of those He loved. The disciples had seen firsthand how Jesus responded to His friends by the amazing reaction to the news that His friend Lazarus had died. The Gospel tells us that "*Jesus began to weep.*" (John 11:35) and then we all know how Jesus raised him for the dead – telling him "*Lazarus come forth!*" (John 11:43) Jesus' love for His friends Lazarus, Martha, and Mary gave us a foretaste of the incredible love that He would display for us – those He called His friends – with His suffering and death on the cross – for the sins and transgressions of us – our debt was paid by Him, for His friends – mere sinners.

Our relationship with Jesus is one of love, loyalty and obedience – grateful obedience – to the one who has loved us more than we can 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.*"