

*Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York*  
*Lutheran Church of the Epiphany ~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía*  
*Hempstead, New York*  
*Marianne K. Tomecek, Interim Pastor*

*Sixth Sunday of Easter B – May 9, 2021*  
*Acts 10:44-48, Psalm 98, 1 John 5:1-6, John 15:9-17*

*Christ is risen, Alleluia! C: He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*

“I love ice cream!”

“I love that color!”

“I love the Mets or Yankees !”

“I love you!”

“I love Jesus!”

Those statements, juxtaposed, sound kind of ridiculous, don't they? Surely, you'll say, what's conveyed in the last two is very different from what's meant in the first three. Yes, but how? And why do we use the same word if we mean very different things?

We don't even have the precision in English that there was in biblical Greek to differentiate between *agape*, *phileo*, *philautias*, and *eros*, or unconditional love, love of siblings, self-love and romantic love.

It's the first type of love that we hear about today from John the evangelist and John the letter writer. This kind of love has also been defined as, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for man and of man for God." (Liddell, H.G., Robert Scott (October 2010). *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. Benediction Classics. p. 4.)

The gospel portion continues the final conversation Jesus had with his disciples the night before he died that we've been listening in on for the last several weeks. Even if they still were blind to what was going to happen the next day (all, except for Judas Iscariot, of course), Jesus was immersed in giving them his last teaching, the one that would equip them to hold together in the face of opposition and attempts to destroy them by the authorities of Rome and the Temple.

It was through *agape*, practiced by the disciples not only toward God, but also toward one another, that would keep the faith family together, and support its growth.

This kind of love has also been defined in this way:

Love in this passage is not a psychological state, nor is it anywhere described as an internal quality. Love is an action—a really difficult action. The definition of love here is a radical willingness to die—not for your child or spouse, but for a fellow follower of Christ.

(Askew, Emily, *Feasting on the Gospels: A Feasting on the Word Commentary, John Volume 2 Chapters 10–21* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 176)

It also has been said that this kind of love is a decision or choice of one who decides to follow Jesus' mandate and then acts to carry out the love. (Goyret, Leonardo, ( [www.workingpreacher.com](http://www.workingpreacher.com) ), Sixth Sunday of Easter, 2021, Comentario del San Juan 15:9-17.)

It's the kind of love that was demonstrated by the marchers across what was then the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and now is the John Lewis Bridge. That occurred on March 7, 1965, now known as Bloody Sunday, to demand the right to vote for African-American citizens of the U.S.

It's the kind of love that was demonstrated by Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who repeatedly spoke out against social injustice against poor and marginalized people, and violence between the military government and left-wing insurgents that led to the Salvadoran Civil War. He continued to make those arguments until he was shot by an assassin while he was celebrating mass in 1980.

It's the kind of love that was demonstrated by marchers this past summer throughout the US and in other parts of the world, in support of the "Black Lives Matter" movement. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and given past response in our country to demonstrations for civil rights, it wasn't clear what the result would be for these marchers.

It's the kind of love that we, as followers of Christ, are called to demonstrate every day.

And Jesus calls us to this love because this is how he loves us. And he calls us to this love because he calls us his friends. (John 15:13-16.) A friend to Jesus was not

just someone with whom he'd spend an evening's entertainment. It connotes a deep and abiding relationship that is mutual, between equals, and gives rise to mutual obligations, including the willingness to give one's life and to speak frankly, not to engage in flattery. (O'Day, Gail R., "I Have Called You Friends," *Friendship*, Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2008, p. 22.)

When Jesus says, "You are my friends," he is also saying, "You are my loved ones." When he says, "You are my loved ones," he is saying, "and I'm laying down my life for you and for your eternal lives." And if we say that we love him, we are implicitly saying that we are willing to lay down our lives for our fellow Christians.

Now, this is all very serious and, knowing that Jesus conveyed this message in the midst of what to him might well have been a deeply troubling and sorrowful time, it is noteworthy that he also said, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11.) What is the source of this joy? Is it, maybe, that he knows that the disciples, his friends, will be friends to one another once he's no longer with them? Is it, maybe that he has completed his work of proclaiming the good news and teaching the disciples how to continue that proclamation, and to continue making friends of new people they meet, so that the community of faith will continue to grow and grow?

Do you think that on that night, Jesus foresaw all of us, today, more than 2000 years later, still learning about life-offering friendship? Of course he did! He was Jesus, the Christ, and he is the Son of God, today as he was "in the beginning." And knowing that the story would continue to be told, I think, gave Jesus joy. Not the joy of delicious, cold ice cream on a hot summer day. Not the joy of a favorite color that sparks our attention. Not the joy of a great game played in the out-of-doors, even in the pandemic, but with vaccinations and distancing measures. No, it is the joy of Christian friendship, life-offering love for one another, that will last on earth until the second coming.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. C: Amen