

Today, our gospel reading from John is a continuation of the words we heard Jesus speaking last Sunday. This whole section of John's gospel is known as Jesus' Farewell Discourse because he is preparing the disciples for his death. He knows he is going to die and he will be leaving them. In John's gospel, these words are some of the last words Jesus speaks during his earthly life, and his **last** words are all about **love**. Jesus speaks of his love for the disciples and, by extension, his love for us. Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so I love you, and so you should love one another."

In our culture, the word "love" is highly ambiguous. In Greek, there are many different words for different **types** of love that become translated into English simply as the word *love*. In today's passage, the word that has been translated as *love* comes from the Greek word *agape*. This kind of love describes the excellence of character that God has by nature. It is all about relationship and it is the kind of love we find characterizing the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. It is the kind of love in which **we** participate through sheer grace. *Agape* describes the Father's love for the Son and it describes God's love for us. *Agape* is all gift – a gift from God. *Agape* is **not** a feeling or inclination. It is the kind of love that

responds as obedience to God's commandment to **choose** to love others as God has **chosen** to love us. *Agape* love is always primarily interested in the good of the other person, rather than one's own self. It is never a love that attempts to possess or dominate others. The concern is always **for** others and *agape* is never subordinating. It always allows authentic, genuine space for others to **be** and **become** and **grow**. And, it is **always** offered without reserve – it is superabundant.

We live in a culture that is extremely self-serving and self-focused, a culture in which love takes on possessive characteristics. In fact, there is frequently a tendency to view love as a commodity, even something that becomes a scarcity as some people begin to think others are receiving more love than **they** are. This is **never** what love is about.

In his book, *What's So Amazing about Grace?*, Philip Yancy tells this wonderful story about Mother Teresa and the definition of *agape* love that she shared at a National Prayer Breakfast. He writes:

... Rolled out in a wheelchair, the frail, eighty-three-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate needed help to stand up. A special platform had been positioned to allow her to see over the podium. Even so, hunched over, four-feet-six-inches tall, she could barely reach the microphone. She spoke clearly and slowly with a thick accent in a voice that nonetheless managed to fill the auditorium.

Mother Teresa said that America has become a selfish nation, in danger of losing the proper meaning of love: "giving until it hurts."
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I have to say Mother Teresa's analysis of our nation was right on. We have become a very selfish nation and far too often self-interest is placed at the top of any list of priorities. In fact, we have become a nation that is increasingly exemplifying the characteristics of narcissism – America first. We also tend to be people who talk about love as this warm feeling inside, this euphoric feeling one has when with some special person. We talk about “making love.” We throw the word *love* around and use it in cheap ways as we talk about loving objects like our house or our car. Quite often we talk about loving something we want to get or have or possess. What we claim to love is often borne out of a consumer driven culture. But, when it comes to people and relationships with others, we can be rather stingy about our love. And, yes, we are self-serving.

So, today it is fitting that Jesus' words break into our lives with a message of love, the love God has for this world, for all people and for each one of us. The love God calls us to live **into** every day is a very different kind of love. The nature of this love is **giving** – as *Mother Teresa* says, ***giving until it hurts***. That is the love Jesus was talking about and that is the love he lived. Jesus not only gave until it hurt, he gave of himself unto death on a cross, all for the sake of love. That is how much he loved the disciples and each one of us.

When we live into this kind of love, it is a choice. We **choose** to love and it becomes a way of life through which **we** become changed. To love in this manner means **obeying** Jesus' command to love. *Agape* love is a disciplined habit of care and concern, one that we work on perfecting over a lifetime as the living Word changes **us**, continually challenging us, taking us to new places, and continually making us new. The love God shows toward **Jesus** is a demanding love, but it is also full of presence, promise and joy. It is a love that prunes, cleanses, challenges, molds, forms and carries **Jesus** throughout his ministry, and it does the same to us. It is that kind of love **we** are called to live.

The love of God that we are invited into is a love without limits. It is a **wasteful** love. It is love that is selfless and thus produces and enhances life. In fact, this love we see in the person of Jesus Christ is a love that invites us into a whole **new** dimension of what it means to be human, a love through which we become more **fully** human. When we live this kind of love, the strictures of life – the boundaries that establish status and power – are reversed and all human images of protective barriers that provide security are removed. When we live this kind of love, the boundaries that have been created to separate us from those considered “others” are obliterated. This love is a servant love that truly cares for **all**

others. When God's love lives in us, we **will** serve the world. We will give our love and our life to others. The status games that human beings play no longer work when we live into this kind of love and when we experience this new consciousness because there are no master-servant relationships inside the embrace of love.

Friends, God is **defined** as love. And, the love of God, the love we are called to live, is not an entity so much as it is a penetrating experience. It is the experience of God in our lives. We discover that God's love embraces people as they are. And, we discover that we **cannot** create this kind of love. One can only **receive** it and, when it has been received, it **must** be immediately shared. The love we are called to live is a love that **cannot** be stored. This love cannot be saved for a rainy day and it cannot be used later like leftovers. The love we are called to live must be passed on because love that is not passed on dies. This is the love that binds us to God and one another. And, this love is the very **meaning** of Jesus.

Adelle, Owen, Viktor, Atu, Griffin and Brenna, today you will be making public affirmation of your baptism as you are confirmed **into** Christian faith. This is important, life-changing stuff! This is a life-giving commitment you will be making today. Confirmation is **not** like graduation. Confirmation is all about making a commitment to fully **become** part of the

faith community, to become deeply connected and live into relationship with God and others as you participate in this Faith community. And, as you make affirmation of your faith, you are called to **love** and continue to live into this love God has for you and all people.

Today, Jesus' last words to the disciples and each one of **you** are, "I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done – kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love. I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends."