

As we have seen yet again in another horrific mass shooting, we as a people need to have a confrontation with self – confront our malevolent viewpoints and malignant ideologies. We need to confront the sin of white supremacy, racism, and hatred, and **move** into a new place, live into a **new story**, a **new** understanding of **God’s love for this world**. When talking about such confrontation, Richard Rohr writes:

Every viewpoint is a view from a point. Unless we recognize and admit our own personal and cultural viewpoints, we will never know how to decentralize our own perspective. We will live with a high degree of illusion and blindness that brings much suffering into the world. [As we work to recognize this,] the **love of God** is the source of **all** truth. Only an outer and positive reference point utterly grounds the mind and heart. People with a distorted image of self, world, or God will be largely incapable of experiencing what is really real in the world. They will see things through a narrow keyhole. They’ll see instead what they need reality to be, what they’re afraid it is, or what they’re angry about. They’ll see everything through their aggressiveness, their fear, or their agenda. In other words, they won’t see *it* at all.

Rohr aptly describes not only **our** present context, but also the early church as it was called to move **beyond** certain boundaries, beyond personal, cultural, and traditional religious viewpoints, and learn to love **beyond** those boundaries and narrow understandings. Today’s readings communicate this as we continue to learn what it means to be inclusive and love others beyond boundaries of cultic religious traditions and ideologies. They teach us what it means to truly be the body of Christ in this world.

In today's first reading from Acts, we come face to face with a confrontation of cultic religious thought. The Jewish people considered all Gentiles unclean and thought the idea of sharing an intimate dinner around a kitchen table in a pagan home was off bounds. Peter had struggled with this and then one afternoon, while praying, he had a vision. He saw a sheet filled with animals repulsive to any Jew – reptiles and pigs for instance. And God said, "Peter, fire up the grill and eat." Peter responded, "No way, Lord, for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth." But the Lord said, "What God makes clean you must not call profane." Then, at that very moment three men asked Peter to come with them to the Roman centurion Cornelius's house. And the Spirit spoke to Peter telling him not to make a distinction between **them** and **us**. So, Peter went to see Cornelius, accepted his hospitality, started to preach about the crucified Messiah who is Lord, and suddenly the Spirit descended on Cornelius just as the Spirit had on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost.

Peter's vision had moved him beyond traditional Jewish religious boundaries. Then, when his fellow Jewish believers demand an explanation for his actions, Peter points to God. **Peter says, "If then God gave them [the Gentiles] the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?"**

God made it crystal clear that Jesus' community on earth is to reflect the fact that, in Jesus, the dividing wall between peoples, nations, classes, races, and genders has been torn down! The church is to invite **all** people to share this life in Christ. God invites **everyone** so God can transform everyone with healing **love**. The community of believers is called to be a community of inclusive, sacrificial love.

Today's gospel reading is also about inclusive, sacrificial love. Jesus is about to die, and he speaks these words to his disciples: "Love one another. I give you a new commandment: Love one another." Now, most of us have always heard these words as a form of the Golden Rule. "Love your neighbor as yourself." Words to live by. Right? Frankly, these are words Jesus, a Jewish man, would have been very familiar with. In fact, these are words Jews, Muslims and indeed people of **all** sorts of faith traditions hold as **sacred**. "Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you and love your neighbor as you love yourself." **However**, the words of the Golden Rule are **not** the words that appear here in the Gospel according to John. In today's reading, Jesus adds a **new twist** when he says, "I give you a **new** commandment: Love one another, **just as I have loved you.**" Now, that's some twist: **"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."**

Harder words were never spoken. These words Jesus shares with us are **not a suggestion**. They are a **command**, to love **all** others as **he** loves. And, quite frankly, who among us can love as Jesus loved? Jesus' idea of loving is hard-edged, it is infinitely tender, and it is nearly impossible. These words haunt me. When I think about loving as Jesus loves, I begin to second-guess my ability to love. Love is not simple. This kind of love is not easy.

Today, the words Jesus speaks to his disciples are some of the last words he shares with them and us as he gives us a **command to love as he loves**. He says **if** you are **my** disciples you **will** stand in a different place, stand in a different state of being, stand in a different energy. He says, you **will** stand in the place of love for **all** others, because **you are to love as I love**. You **will** do this because **God is love**.

When talking about this passage, Father Richard Rohr says that love is not **what** as much as **how!** If you do not **live** love for **all** others, God is simply an abstraction in your life. If you do not **live** love for **all** others, God is simply a theory in your mind. **Living** the love that Jesus showed and lived is what brings healing and wholeness to our lives, our communities, our society and our world. The command to love as Jesus loves is clear and simple. We are to love **all** people, no exceptions. This kind of love is

not easy, and you **cannot** depend on feelings if you are going to love as Jesus loves. Like forgiveness – love is a **decision** of your mind and heart. Love is a **choice**. When you are not living this kind of love, not living **in** love for **all** people, you will use any excuse to be unhappy, angry, and hateful. Quite honestly, such negative feelings, actions, behaviors, attitudes and attributes **cannot** coexist in the mind and heart of someone who has made the decision to love as Jesus loves. They **cannot** coexist because **living in** the love of Jesus means you are standing in a different space, a different state, a different energy, a different reality. It means you are **consciously aware** that you are living **in** the reality and presence of the loving, living Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, as Jesus gives this command to love even as he loves we must look at what his love looks like. His is a love that surrenders itself to God's holy dream to love **all** people, this **entire** world, to love and care for **all** of creation, to love the **entire** cosmos. His love surrenders itself to God's holy dream to love the world **into life**, even to the point of giving his own life. Jesus' love glorifies God's purpose and mercy, and this is the love he **commands** us to live.

So, what does this love look like in **our** very lives? I love the way Brian McClaren talks about love in his book, ***Corey & the Seventh Story***.

He writes that we, as people, seem to continually live the same six old stories over and over again, the same old six stories that seem to be running the show. Those six stories are:

The story of power to dominate,  
The story of striking back with fury and hate,  
The story of running to find a safe place,  
Or pointing at others to shame and disgrace,  
Or being stuck in self-pity for the pain we've been through,  
Or of me having more shiny objects than you.

These same six old stories steal freedom and laughter,  
So, **nobody** lives happily ever after. **But....**

There's a **new** Seventh Story to live by, my friends,

A new Seventh Story **without** "us against them"—  
Of working for fairness in **all** that we do,  
Of **refusing** to strike back when others strike you,  
Of **facing** our problems and **not** running to hide,  
Of **not** letting differences make us divide,  
Of turning our pain into **compassion** for others,  
Of **not** wanting more than our sisters and brothers.

The **new** Seventh Story that I'm speaking of  
Is the story of peace, it's the story of **love**.

Jesus spoke to those early disciples, and he speaks to each one of us saying, "I give you a **new** commandment, that you love one another.

**Just as I have loved you**, you also should love one another. By this everyone will **know** that you are my disciples, if you have **love** for one another." That is our **new story**. May we live in the reality of such **love**!