



St. Andrew's United Church of Christ

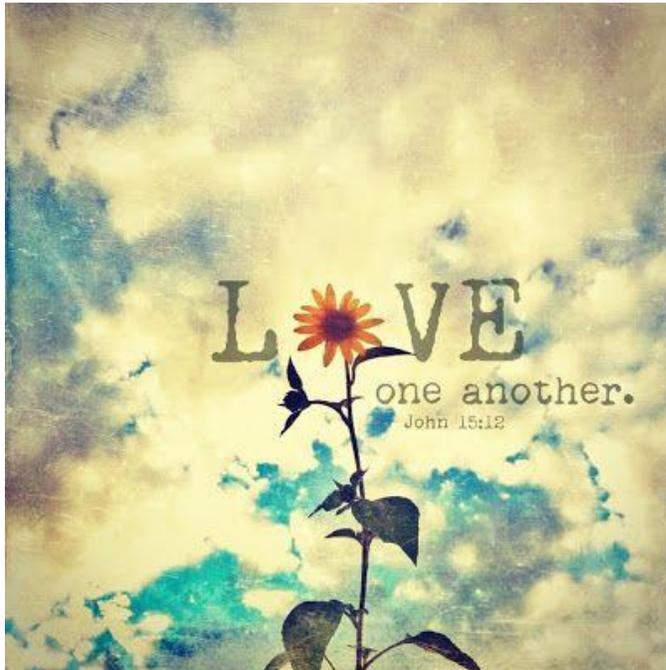
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SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 17, 2020

10:00 A.M.



Dear Friends in Christ,

It's hard for me to believe that this Sunday will mark the 9th Sunday of worshipping at home. Who would have thought that, certainly not me!

In our scripture lesson for today, Jesus links the disciples love for him to obedience to him and his commandments. Jesus commands his disciples to love them and then asks God the Father to give them the Holy Spirit to enable them to obey his commands.

It seems ironic to me, that in obeying Jesus' command to love one another, as he loved us, that today we are demonstrating that love for one another by staying apart! Strange world, today, isn't it?

Thank you for your continued prayerful and financial support of St. Andrew's ministry. Your support is vital and needed! I will look forward to seeing you "live" and in "color" as soon as it is healthy and safe to gather again.

Peace and Prayers

In Christ,

Pastor Bigelow

Silent Prayer for the Beginning of Worship — Almighty God, you have taught us through Christ, that love fulfills the new law. As we offer our worship, help us this day to love You with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength for this is the first and greatest commandment, and then to try and love our neighbor as ourselves. Through Jesus Christ, we pray, Amen.

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP THE TRIUNE GOD

CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed!

May our lives profess and proclaim that “our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.”

(Psalm 124:8)

Amen!

This is the day the Lord has made,

let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Let us come before God with thanksgiving

and proclaim God’s love as we worship.

SALUTATION

“Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Amen!

(Revelation 1:4-5)

GATHERING HYMN — [O God, Our Help in Ages Past](#)

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and faithful God, once again we find ourselves called to be the church, the body of Christ, without being together and without a building. Help us to make these big adjustments in our worship, without losing sight of you or one another. Draw near to us now as we draw nearer to you. In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.

WE ARE RENEWED BY THE SPIRIT

CALL TO CONFESSION

We cannot come before God unless we are first honest with ourselves about who we are; about the mistakes we have made and about how well or poorly we care for others. In this spirit, let us offer our prayers to God, let us pray.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord Jesus, you have called your church to live out a passionate love for God, which overflows into love for one another. We confess that there are many obstacles that get in the way of our love for you and one another. We easily get distracted and lose our focus. In our life together, differences and disagreements take over and pettiness can stand in the way of growth and vitality.

(silent reflection)

By the power of the Holy Spirit, break down the obstacles that get in the way of loving you and one another. Help us to be able to disagree without being disagreeable, and to be compassionate with one another, in spite of differences. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE AND FORGIVENESS

With everlasting love, I will have compassion for you, says the Lord your Redeemer. I am he, who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and I will not remember your sins. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. (Isaiah 54:8, 43:35, 44:22)

GOD'S DIRECTION FOR OUR LIVES

I Corinthians Chapter 13 – While we often hear this passage read at weddings, Paul is writing to a very highly conflicted church in the city of Corinth.

WE HEAR AND LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Old Testament—Psalm 66:8-20

New Testament — John 14:15-21

SERMON – *The Measuring Stick for a Healthy Church* (found on pages 5-6)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

HYMN OF RESPONSE [Love One Another](#)

WE GO FORTH TO REVEAL JESUS CHRIST IN THE WORLD

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

We thank you for your Holy Spirit, which has called us into this community of faith; this church with its fellowship, worship, music and praise. We thank you for your love which accepts us as we are, and a love that does not leave us as we are, but a love that challenges us to grow in faith and grace.

God, you are our source of love and compassion in this world of suffering and pain. We offer our prayers for all those who are up against overwhelming challenges today.

We pray God, for those who are hungry and thirsty in body, mind and spirit; be a help to those who are living in fear of disease or stricken in grief over a loss of a loved one, or the stress of loss of employment, income, or their homes.

Strengthen us to make your light shine in these dark days and to be the church and do the work of the church by bringing healing and hope in these chaotic and uncertain times. Guide us by your Spirit, that we may accomplish the will of your love and build with you the kingdom of love, in which none will cause the suffering of others, and will be caring, loving children of yours. This we pray in Jesus' name, who taught us to pray:

***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.***

PARTING HYMN [*They Will Know We Are Christians*](#)

BENEDICTION

Go out into the world in peace; have courage; hold on to what is good; return no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak and help the suffering; honor all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let the people...say Amen!!!

SERMON – *The Measuring Stick for a Healthy Church*

SCRIPTURE

Old Testament—Psalm 66:8-20

New Testament — John 14:15-21

Text: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15)

There is no shortage of remedies to fix the church. There are packaged outreach programs for people of all ages: Boosters, born before 1945; Boomers, born between 1946-1961; Buster, born between 1962-1981; Millennials, 1981...GenXs, etc. These programs come beautifully gift wrapped with ways to build up the church. While they may be helpful tools for a congregation to understand its ministry, I wonder if they are more about our need to fix, rather than the church’s need to be fixed.

In these chapters, Jesus is talking about matters that are of greatest importance. It is kind of his last will and testament. In the last chapter, Jesus gave the disciples a new commandment to live by. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John:34,35) And in today’s text, “if you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Love in the Gospel of John, is more of an in-house sort of love. In Matthew, Jesus tells us to love our enemies. But here we are urged to love our fellow believers, who sometimes might be viewed as fr-enemies. There are, and have been, movements in the church where a call is heard to get back to basics; by going into all the world and making disciples through baptism, preaching and teaching. Some will emphasize this more evangelistic commission rather than stress Jesus’ prophetic commission here, to love one another and follow his commandments.

In today’s text, Jesus says, “if you love me, you will keep my commandments.” In these concluding words to his disciples, Jesus is reminding them if they believe in him and love him, then they ought to act like it, particularly in their behavior with other believers.

When people discover that I am a minister, particularly after a wedding ceremony and at the reception table, I will invariably hear how they no longer attend a church because of how they were wounded and hurt by what a clergy person had done; by what a congregant had said to them; or by a decision that didn’t quite go their way. Often times, the response is true of the way clergy and congregations treat people. Gandhi once said that he loved Jesus, but his followers gave him concern.

My response has always gone something like this; “I am sorry about what happened to you in church, but we are all sinners being saved by Jesus, but sadly sometimes sin gets the best of us. Are you willing to give Jesus’ people another try”?

Sometimes people can't see the love of Christ because of the unloving behavior of those whom Christ has clearly commanded to love one another. Could that be us? Tertullian, who was one of the first apologists for the Christian faith, said that there was a major reason why the church defeated the Roman Empire without firing a single shot or raising a single platoon. The world looked at the Church and exclaimed, see how these Christians love each other! Too many people today might say, see how they fight like cats and dogs! That is not to say that conflict is unhealthy, wherever there are people gathered, there shall conflict be as well. Communities, churches, families, marriages, all experience conflict. Conflict is a part of life! What is important, is how we handle conflict, that is what makes the difference. If we love Jesus and follow his commandments, handling conflict takes on a constructive building-up attitude, instead of destructive, tearing-down attitude. Earlier in worship, in God's Direction for Our Lives, we read from I Corinthians 13, which helps add understanding to Jesus' command here in our text.

God has not seen fit to give the church a great deal of power or standing, that it once enjoyed in previous centuries and years. We are no longer the only act in town or the most influential organization, but we are given the one gift that the world finds most elusive. We are given the one thing to demonstrate to the world why Jesus makes possible a family that the world cannot produce by the world's means.

There are many measuring sticks we use to measure experience: Was it fun? Do I like it? Did I dislike it? Churches have measuring sticks too. The size and demographics of a congregation, budget and bodies, beauty of a building, cleanliness of the women's rest room, convenience of the parking lot, the number of activities and whatever other measuring sticks you can think of...

Jesus gives us yet another and better measuring stick, the most important one, "if you love me, you will keep my commandments"! That's a tall commandment for us, but a healthy measuring stick for the church. Do we love Jesus? Are we keeping his commandments? How does St. Andrew's measure up, using those metrics? That's a good question for a virtual coffee hour ☺.

Let us pray.

Lord God, you know how difficult it is for us to love one another; so, you sent your Holy Spirit to prod and push us; to inspire and empower us; to move forward in love, particularly to love one another in the congregation. Help us to listen more deeply and to share one another's burdens and thereby witness to the world that your Advocate makes possible a loving, caring and courageous community of love; even among people like us.

In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.