

John 15:9-17

Jesus calls his followers to love one another just as he has loved them. There is no greater than to lay down one's life, as Jesus does, for one's friends. Through this obedience to Jesus' command to love we bear fruit that lasts. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

"War, violence, cancer, suicide, poverty, discrimination, apathy, revenge, abuse, injustice. Some days it's just too much for my little heart." (Facebook post). We could add sexism, anxiety, sorrow, the #metoo movement, broken relationships, disillusionment, distrust, depression, and disregard. It's that kind of world. Which makes Jesus' words of joy seem out of place in passages that deal primarily with Jesus' impending death.

Where is joy in the midst of the hardship Jesus described and in the peril that is sure to come? Where is joy when you need it the most? Jesus knows that the presence of joy needs to be heard, needs to be felt, when you face things that assume and anticipate a profound absence of joy.

We may do well to recall that the Greek words for "grace" and "joy" share the same root. Joy may very well be a feeling of grace, the emotion of grace, even the response to grace. Joy is that indescribable sense when you find yourself experiencing abundant grace. In other words, joy amidst all that was named above, all that you can certainly name in your own life, is not an answer. It's an affirmation. It's the guarantee of God's grace when all that is good seems so far away. It's the security of God's love when it appears that love is nowhere to be felt. It's the hope that even in the darkest places of separation, God's abiding and our abiding in God is promised and present.

(Karoline Lewis, adapted)

COCU36B Easter 6B

The theme of love continues in the Lectionary this week, but the "one another" that we are called to love expands radically. In the **Psalm** all creation is called to praise God for the righteousness and justice that God brings to all people. In the **Acts** reading, Peter preaches to a group of Gentiles, with the result that they, too, receive the Holy Spirit, revealing that God's love, grace and salvation is for all people, not just the Jews. With these two readings in mind, **John's letter**, which calls us to love all of God's children, becomes even more challenging because we realise that the whole creation is God's child, and all people who inhabit God's world are God's children – which means that there is no one to whom we can legitimately deny love. Finally, in **the Gospel**, the call to love one another must now be understood to go beyond just our companions in the faith.

The "*one another*" whom we are called to love through the sacrificial laying down of our lives, now includes all people and all creatures. The moment we begin to try and exclude some people from our love, for whatever reason, we have failed to truly embrace the love of God. The radical inclusivity of the Gospel is one of the hardest truths to embrace. In so many ways the world is easier to manage and navigate when we can easily distinguish between friend and enemy, between "us" and "them". National boundaries and patriotism become important lubricants for this divided world. Personal agendas and interest groups are easier to maintain, and the world is much simpler when we only have to love those who love us, who are like us and who are part of our group. In this view of things, we can make economic, military and even environmental decisions easily, because we only have to worry about ourselves and "our world". Unfortunately, we inevitably discover the fallacy in our thinking when we see the connectedness of everything, and we begin to see that our actions have consequences for others, even as theirs do for us. Our divisions are, ultimately, illusions, and so the Gospel call to love all people is really the most common of sense. When we begin to love sacrificially, we become more mindful of how our decisions and actions and agendas impact others, and as we start seeking to live in love, the world becomes a more peaceful, loving, and co-operative place – which ultimately benefits us. As we learn to love sacrificially, as Jesus did, we bring life to others and we enjoy a more vibrant, abundant life ourselves. *(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

Psalm 98

An exhortation to all creation to praise God for the wonderful works God has done, revealing God's righteousness to all nations and bringing God's justice into the world among all people.

O sing to the Lord a new song,

for God has done marvellous things.

God's right hand and holy arm have gained the victory. God has made known the victory and revealed God's vindication in the sight of the nations. God has remembered God's steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of God.

**Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.**

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord. Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for God is coming to judge the earth.

**God will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.**

Acts 10:44-48

As Peter preaches to the Gentile believers in Cornelius' house, the Holy Spirit comes on them and they begin to speak with other tongues. Peter then baptises them confirming that God's salvation is for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

1 John 5:1-6

When we love God and keep God's commandments, we love God's children. It is by this love that we know that we are born of God, and it is this faith that overcomes the world.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey God's commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

The community to whom 1 John was written was facing a crisis. Former members of the community were denying that Jesus was truly the Messiah, God's flesh and blood, fully human, son. Like many churches facing doctrinal conflict, the community was confused, afraid, and unsure what to do. Whom should they believe? How could they know what was true, and what was not? 1 John's simple, confident response is as relevant today as it was when the letter was first written: You know *who* you are, you know *whose* you are, and you know *what you have been told from the beginning*. God's own Spirit shows us what is true. There's no need to panic or argue. Live your faith.

1 John reminds the community that everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been born of God. As God's children, they can rest assured that they are loved and protected. If they love God, then naturally they will love anyone born of God too, because how can one love a parent without loving the child whom the parent brought into being? The child of God referred to in 1 John 5:1 is first and foremost Jesus, but also means to any child of God, as v.2 makes clear. Everyone who believes in Jesus becomes his brother or sister. Whoever loves the parent loves not just one of the parent's children but all of them. The consequences of this conclusion are enormous: every child of God is linked to Jesus. Every injustice done to a child of God echoes the injustice done to him. Every act of violence committed against a child of God recalls the violence committed against Jesus. Loving God, loving God's children, and keeping God's commandments form inseparable links in a circular chain. (*Judith Jones, adapted*)