

Sixth Sunday of Easter  
Year B

Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

Love - one of the most common words in the Bible, especially in the writings of John. We hear it, see it, talk about it, encourage it - but what is it? You have heard many sermons from me that touch on the topic of love, but have any of those efforts really explained love?

C.S. Lewis has written a book about love entitled *The Four Loves*. In this book, Lewis explores the four Greek words that are translated into English as love. Bishop Curry has written about the way of love - how we might see love expressed in the world today. There are countless other books which attempt to enlighten us about this most commonly used word. And still we must ask, what is it and how do we show it? Does this word have the same meaning today as it did 2000 years ago, or has our culture jaded us in our outlook?

Jesus says, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Does this mean that I have to jump in front of a bullet to prove my love for you? No, that is just the greatest love, in Jesus' words. Obviously, there are many other forms of love and ways to show that love. Jesus tells us about those other ways. He says that we are to abide in Him, even as a branch abides in the vine. We cannot survive in this life without abiding in Jesus. We also cannot bear fruit, reach out to other people, without abiding in Jesus. A branch cannot bear fruit without the vine; nor can we do anything for God except by abiding in Jesus. We can do nothing without God.

In his first letter, John asks, "Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" While we may not be thinking about world conquest, John is clearly telling us the result of loving God, of believing in Jesus as the Son of God. Just as he says in the Gospel, he states it here in different words. Our actions are the result of our faith in Jesus.

Peter and Cornelius share this same result. Peter could have remained in his stubborn belief that only that which is kosher is acceptable to God and, therefore, he should reject everything else. Cornelius could have remained adamant that the Roman way was the only way and to mingle with a group of people who were not even accepted by their own was unbecoming an officer in the Roman army. But, both Peter and Cornelius moved beyond their selfish, parochial thoughts and explored what God means by love; to mingle with "the other" and let God do the rest.

We live our love for God in our everyday activities. Jesus does not ask us to do anything extraordinary, but to be ourselves in God's service. We are not asked to die for our friends or to be a super-saint. We are shown an example of love in the actions of both Jesus and Peter, in the acceptance of "the other" as well as in the divine love of Jesus. We are to gather strength from one another, even as the community that gathered around John gained courage from the others in that group. We show our love for one another through our actions within this community of

believers, as well as in our actions to the community that surrounds us. Love, as Jesus would have us to love, is the mutual support we give to our friends. Love is not heroic or emotional, but faith in God in action.