

A New Song of Resurrection
6th Sunday after Easter, May 09, 2021 Trinity UMC

We have been reading about Jesus in the Gospel of John. Jesus the Shepherd. Jesus says I am the Vine. Today we will read from John on the several many passages where Jesus talks about his commandment to Love.

Scripture John 15: 12 – 16a NRSV

"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. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants^a any longer, because the servant^a 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...

Sermon: 'Mother May I?'

Jesus teaches so often about loving each other.

Maundy Thursday—John 13.

1 letter of John

Mark 12:29 - 30 when one of the teachers of the law asked Jesus, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important.' Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. 'Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love is not just important...it is THE most important, top of the line, number 1 gift that Jesus teaches. And it's the best thing that we can receive from God and give to God and each other.

And Jesus didn't create the Love Commandment as a new song...out of the blue. Loving God and Loving neighbors is not a new melody with new words. No, these most important commandments have been part of God's intention for us from the days of Moses,

Deut. 6: 4- 5 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.^a ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

And God's words to us through Moses go on:

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷ Recite them to your children—

I think about these words every Sunday when I talk to the Children and especially when I do baptisms...Who here is going to recite these words to the children of Trinity and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise?

Loving God is an old song that has been sung for generations. And the 'Love your neighbor' part, too. That was Lev. 19:18 and do you know what else is included in that Leviticus verse? *'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge...just 'Love your neighbor (your associate, your companion, your acquaintance) as yourself.'*

Old song, old melody and Mother's Day is a great time to remember that even the best of songs can get stale.

Even our favorite songs can get old and worn out after being sung and hummed and whistled for months and years. The old love songs of God...how do we keep them new and fresh? That's a really important questions Because...

Love is like songs:

Even the most passionate and committed love can get weary and worn out.

How many of your favorite love songs from the early decades of your life seem kind of old fogey-ish now a days?

I'm here to preach it to you this a.m. the fact that Mothers, and fathers too, and grandparents too...know that with each child born into this world, we get to make love, our love and God's love, a new song that fits that new little person just right.

The ancient prayer, which I slightly re-wrote for this season, says 'New each day is your love, O God and all day long you are working for good in the world.'

We, as God's people are challenged to find a way to make love, God's love, real for each child born on this earth...And that's not a huge challenge Because as we share our human love with babies and with each other, we are showing the little ones how God's love works...how God's steadfast love endures forever and ever.

The game 'Mother May I' came to my mind this week. Have any of you played that recently? Or watched your kids and grand-kids play?

A quick refresher course. Of course there are local variations on this but I learned it like this:

How to play the Mother, May I Game:

1. Line up each player shoulder to shoulder about a foot apart. Number off.
2. The player who is "Mother" stands in front of the other players.
3. Mother then calls on a child by name and gives them instructions so they can move forward. For instance, "Emma, take 2 GIANT steps forward."
4. The child who is called on must then say, "Mother, may I?"
5. Mother then responds either "Yes", and the child can take the steps forward, or "No" and the child must comply. Or some alteration;
6. If a child makes a move and forgets to ask, "Mother, may I?" then must go back to the starting line.
7. If another child takes the steps out of turn, they must also go back to the starting line.
8. The first child to reach Mother, wins!

The purpose of the game is to get closer and closer to whoever is the Mother. The first one to reach 'Mom' wins and gets to be Mother in the next round. I thought of this game because the purpose of our life, as followers of Jesus, is to get closer and closer to God.

When you love anybody and anything, you are drawing closer to God.

Love's power far outweighs our self-centered and worn out prayers.

Love has a way of making all things new...recentering us and allowing for new words and melodies to express the old song of Love God. Love your neighbor.

Mother May I is an old game/an old song. But I can imagine re-writing it for kids today, in a way that gives them a chance to get closer to God. How about playing 'Mother May I love...

Imagine if you will...taking a 3 or 4 year old for a walk in the park at this time of year...in the springtime. Or any time of the year for that matter. At that age, many in that age group are learning the language...putting things into words in their own unique way. And imagine teaching the little one the game of...Mother May I love... And when the child becomes enchanted with a bug...you can teach them to say: Mother may I love bugs...You can say: Jesus loves bugs and you can too! Mother may I love flowers....Jesus loves flowers and you can too! Mother may I love snakes...Jesus loves snakes but I don't want it near me!

Mother may I love trash...Jesus loves it when we pick up trash.
Mother may I love those kids over there...Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. And we can too.

And as kids get older, they might remember the game and come and start a conversation saying Mother, may I love purple hair or video games or social justice and you will have a great format for talking about what is useful for God's purposes and what is selfish and even harmful to us. There are some things and some people even who children come to love and we as the followers of Jesus, as the adults in the room, have to teach them that love is not just pretty bugs and flowers. Some of whom and what we love can be dangerous to us and it's valuable to learn that sometimes love means staying close to God instead of getting close to someone or something that could hurt you.

But as children grow into their own personal, new and unique song of love for God and their neighbors...they need a format and a safe way to talk about what their feeling and thinking and doing. And we who love the children, we can learn so much by their questions and explorations. This Mother May I Love game is valuable for us too because it forces us to look at the limitations on love that we may have built into our song repertoire.

I read a story this week about a young boy, eight or nine years old, went to a block party with his parents and neighbors and there was a man dancing to an old time fiddle band. The boy was enchanted by the man with a cowboy hat and boots. Flinging his arms around and tapping his feet and laughing and enjoying himself so, so much. That night at the dinner table, the young boys said... I love that man and his dancing. There was just the heartbeat of a pause and then His father said: 'You don't love him...you admire him. You respect him. But boys don't love men.'

And maybe that is the Man's code—I don't know. I don't want to judge. But I do know and God does judge the ways in which we stop ourselves from loving people...if they make us uncomfortable in some way. If we have a grudge against them. We stop ourselves from loving the people we get mad. Our anger can make us forget love and start talking revenge or sarcasm or bitterness or contempt for others. That's a new and ugly song that seems to take hold more and more these days. And it's a song that is not of Love. A song that fails to comprehend the transforming power of God's love through Jesus Christ who teaches us to love.

Yes, love is an old tune that needs new words with each generation and with each situation that would lead us into anger and fear and anxiety. Wouldn't it be something if we played that game ourselves and asked Mother may I love those who I don't understand?

Mother may I love those who say things that raise my blood pressure?

Mother may I love those who don't agree with me about what's best for the country?
For the economy? For the safety of everyone exposed to the COVID?

And then listen for the voice of Jesus saying:

'Love one another as I have loved you.'

'Forgive one another as I have forgiven you.'

'Help and console and comfort one another, as I have helped and consoled and comforted you.'

Remember that we are friends of Jesus. He has called you friends, because he has made known to us everything that he heard from his Father. And Jesus appointed us to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last...

Love, my friends, is the fruit that lasts forever. Mother May we all love to the height and depth and farthest reaches of our human hearts? In His name. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

Loving Friend Jesus...your love and your friendship are deep and wide. Are rich and powerful. Protect us from our own self-limitation. Increase our capacity for loving others and for allowing others to love us.

Where there is hunger...show us how to bring nourishment.

Where there is pain...guide us in offering comfort.

Where there is loneliness...let us be the light of companionship and care.

Where there is grief...may your own personal power for consolation be present when we can't be there.

There are so many reasons to be vengeful and to carry a grudge but they are not good reasons...No, you give us the most compelling reason to break free from those old molds and to grow in our capacity and willingness to love, to hope and to share joy with all who are around us. I know that your power is unlimited, without restriction so thanks be to you in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray saying...

Lord's Prayer

As we prepare to leave this place, I want to tell you about a new group that is starting up here in Dickinson Co. Christian for Racial Understanding Outgrowth of the Ministerial Assoc. in association with Rev. Mike March at the Presby Church and Rev. Ed Laarman who lives in Niagara and was active in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s through his work in Campus ministries. Nancy Reece, the Chaplain at Mary Hill Nursing Home in Niagara. After a lot of prayer and discussion, ready to start inviting people who are intrigued, interested, concerned about the need for us to sing a new song, yes maybe to old melodies, about racial issues in this country and in this area. Please let me know if you are interested and I can tell you more about it.

Benediction

May the song you sing in your heart be pleasing to God,
moving you to the passion and compassion of Jesus,
uplifted by a Spirit that keeps you humming life's tune **of holy love.**

May peace flow through us as music through an instrument.

May love flow through us like the warmth from the sun.

May peace flow through us so that we may be a vessel
of the love of God for everyone, for everyone. Amen.

Closing Song 'God Will Take Care of You' #130