

“Little children,
I am with you only a little longer.
You will look for me, but where I go, you cannot come.
I will give you a new commandment
that you love one another.
Just as I have loved you.”

**5th Sunday in Easter,
April 24th, 2016
John 13:31-35
The Rev Fanny Belanger**

In this passage of John, as Jesus prepares himself to die,
He gives us a last command: Love,
just as I love you.
But how is it exactly that Jesus loves us?

Well, there is this story about a child who came to her priest telling him
That she had visions, where she saw Jesus talking to her.
And of course the priest was puzzled,
a bit worried the child would make that up
but also trusting that maybe, the child genuinely had an encounter with the Lord.
So the priest told her that
the same morning in his prayers, he had confessed a sin to Jesus.
And he said, well if it's really
Jesus
Ask him about this sin
I've just told him, and told him only – so if he tells you about it, well, then I'll know for sure it's him.
So the little girl did that:
when she saw the Lord the next time she asked him.
She said
Do you know about the sin that the priest asked you to forgive him, a few days ago?
And this is what the girl said Jesus answered:
No, I don't remember.

No, I don't remember about his sin.
You know, I have no idea if this story is true
But in my heart,
I cannot help thinking it sounds so much like Jesus.
It's the voice of the shepherd, tender and forgiving,
I think this is the way Jesus loves us.
It's a love that does not keep records or ask for proofs,
Jesus does not remind us of how much we should be thankful and humbled and concerned
with everything he did for us.
It's a love that is always fresh, new, ready to start over,
it's a love that sprang like fresh water: an image John uses many times in his Gospel.

Love sprang from Jesus's heart.

You know, I am worried about how sometimes we hear among Christians that
it's difficult to love.
We keep saying: Marriage is challenging, raising children can be a pain, helping people is complicated,
Charity can be toxic.
We say that: “Love is hard”.

Well, I came to think
maybe it's not love that is hard
Maybe it's only our hearts that are hardened.

Because I don't think it is hard for Jesus to love us.
In the Gospel at least, it looks like sometimes it was even too easy for Jesus to love, and frankly dangerous for him.
How many times do we see him
unable to resist a prayer, unable to send somebody away, unable to condemn a sinner.
When Jesus tries to be tough
it never quite works out, like with the woman at the well.
Even if he does not feel like it, Jesus always ends up giving forgiving forgetting
and even forsaking his own life for the benefits of others.
Maybe you remember that when he was on the cross, some people mocked Jesus telling him that he
who saved many “was unable to save his own life”
Well, maybe was he. Maybe he was unable to save his own life,
Because he
could not resist the outpourings of his heart, of his life,
giving it all
He could not protect his life as a mother would not try to protect her life if she had to give it
to save her child.

I have a vivid memory of something that happened when I was a teenager.
I was walking my dog and he spotted in a river a duck with her young
and so the dog just threw himself into the water to chase them
and what happened to my complete surprise is that the mother duck
turned away from her young, left them where they were
and she started paddling on the other direction, like she was trying to take off and to flee from the dog.
But then I noticed that what she was doing was that,
far from fleeing, she was actually making as much noise as she could
So the dog would follow her and attack her
not the young.
Well, indeed she could not save her own life – but the thing is: she was not even trying to.
Jesus is like this mother duck. He does not even think.
He just turns the blame on him, so that no evil can happen to us.
He goes where he certainly does not want us to go, giving up his life to the powers of death.
So we may live.
This how Jesus loves us.

And so of course, we try to do our best to love
and
At church, we are asked to kneel as we are able,
pray as we can
serve as we feel so moved.
But today Jesus does not ask us to love
to the best of our capacities, to love *as we can*
Jesus asks us to love *as he loved us*.

How can we do it?

Well, good news, it
does not mean only that we have to love as much as Jesus loves
what it means also is that
He gives us the strength, the power, and the will to love
Because our hearts are hardened, indeed.
Because it's impossible for us to love everybody or even
somebody.
Not only it's hard to love the foreigner, the poor and the needy
But it's even hard to love our friends, our family
We may love people when they are smart and strong and funny
But it's more difficult to love the one who is weak, and sick, the one losing his mind, addicted.
And so we need need to love them with Jesus's love.
That's what John did.

“My little children,
I am writing to you no new commandment
But an old commandment that you have had from the beginning
A commandment that is true in him and in you”
These words aren't from the Gospel, we have just heard
but it's John speaking, in his first Epistle.
And so this is funny to realize that
John used to address his community in the same way Jesus addressed his disciples in our passage
using the same words: “*My little children*”
Or maybe
it' s because in his Gospel, John put into Jesus's mouth his own way of speaking.
Yet it does not matter who said what because the truth is not to be found in
what Jesus said exactly on that day
How he put it.
The truth is to be found in the fact that John came to love
the same way Jesus did.
John felt for his community the love Jesus felt for his disciples.
He loved as He loved.
John could completely identify with Jesus's words and Jesus's life.
And it did not happen because John was a saint.
It happened because John was close to Jesus's heart
and he was somewhat
taken into this outpouring of overflowing love
running from his heart.

So maybe it can happen to us, too, even if *love is hard*, as we say.
Maybe we can start to love in ways
We never imagined
Not as we are able, but as He is able.
Maybe we can love with His love, not our love.
Jesus does not command us to love period, because it would be unfair to us.
We cannot do that.
We love what is easy to love, we love what is strong and beautiful
we love what makes us happy
We cannot control our feelings – it's true.

And yet, we can love as he loves, we can love with his love because
He lives inside of us.
Jesus glorified the Father with his love, and the Father
glorified Jesus manifesting his love in him.
What is true between the Father and Jesus can be true between Christ and us.
We can glorify him and he will reveal his glory in us.
But we need to be close to him.
We need to sit with him, we need to stay at the table,
not taking off as Judas did, because
it's hard for us to love indeed.
We need to learn from Jesus how to love,
Not only for our own sake, but because Love is our duty.

A few weeks ago, I was visiting a church and sitting on the porch was a homeless
and he looked
really down
I asked him, *what's so wrong today?*
and he said (he did not say
I have no job, no money, I am tired, I am cold, I slept on the street I had
nothing to eat)
No, he said to me: "Nobody loves me"
*Nobody loves me, wherever I go people
turn their back on me
don't touch me, don't talk to me, don't look at me.*
I asked him if he could remember a time he was
loved
and he said that when he was nine he was taken away from his mom
and placed from family to family until he was an adult and started living on the streets.
And you know,
I did not try to contradict him because it was probably true: Nobody loved him.
The story of homeless is always the same story
Not being loved, they are unable to love themselves,
to take care of themselves
and that's why they are unable to make it.

Jesus commands us to love
We have a duty to love because we all have a right to be loved in order to live.
In our small bubbles, we often live lives where
even if relationships are sometimes difficult
we take love for granted, and so we don't even realize that
Love
is what keeps us alive and keeps us going.
Love kept Jesus going to the cross
Love glorified God in the worst times of suffering
Love made Jesus alive after his passing.
The book of Revelation offers us today a vision where our world
is healed by God's love
That's the Revelation that was made to John, indeed.
In Christ Jesus, we can be made instrument of this love. We just need to turn to him. Amen.