Topic: Love In Action (Easter 5, Lectionary B)

Scripture: Psalm 98, 1 John 5:1-6, John 15:9-17

Hymns: 64 All Creatures of Our God, vu336 Christ Whose Glory, vu660 How Firm a Foundation

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Let’s take a moment to pray…

Mighty God, we thank you for your Holy Scriptures. We would be lost without them, they are a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway – and when we stray from them, we stray from You. O God, this is your revelation of who You are, of your directives to your church and your people. We do well to study Your word, and to dig in deep, and truly take in what you are teaching us. Help us today, O God. We want to hear the Holy Spirit. We are trusting, we are praying in the Spirit, and we ask in Jesus name, that your Holy Spirit would illumine these pages – that it fill the words of the preacher and the listener alike, and that we may know that today we have met with the living God. For we pray these things in Jesus name, amen.

(SLIDE) Love. The word is written over 680 times in the NIV, over 500 times in the NKJV, and over 740 times in the RSV of the Bible. As a term, as a word, it is often used as a verb - a word of action. It comes to us in almost every commonly known Scripture verse…

1 Corinthians 13:13 (SLIDE) - read at many weddings still today; John 3:16 - (SLIDE) there’s always some guy holding up a sign with this verse on it at televised events; Ephesians 5:25 - (SLIDE) reminding us husbands to love our wives; and 1 Corinthians 16:14 - (SLIDE of you) which you hear every Sunday before you leave these hallowed walls, let all you do be done in love.

Love is not a mere sentiment nor a fleeting emotion… love is the essence, the very core of our identity as followers of Christ. 1 John 5 reminds us of this profound truth: that love is intricately linked to our faith. (SLIDE)

**Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves His child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands.**

**In fact, this is love for God: to keep His commands. And His commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.**

**This is the one who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.**

Notice how love and faith are connected here. The apostle emphasizes that our love for God and for one another is the natural outflow of our faith. It is not merely about saying we believe, but it is about LIVING OUT that belief through love.

Our Risen Lord, Jesus Himself, exemplified this love during His ministry here on earth. In John 15 we hear very clearly His commandment: **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**”.

Jesus doesn’t just command us to love one another like a government official or a military commander. His commandment doesn’t come as the “Do as I say, but not as I do” kind of command from a parental figure or friend.

Instead, Jesus shows us the ultimate example of love in two ways. First, as He says in this reading here this morning the Father has loved Jesus, and so the outflow of Jesus is to love us. In order to love, we must first be filled for we cannot know the feeling or the measure of love until we receive it and experience it for ourselves. Jesus knows love because the Father pours love into Him. Thus, Jesus knows how to love us, and it pours out of Jesus onto us.

When we abide in Jesus’ love, we then feel and experience the love of the Father that was poured onto Jesus and we then know how to love others. We know love, Scripture tells us, because God first loved us.

The second example of of love comes in the action of Jesus laying down His life for us. He calls us His friends and invites us into a deep, intimate relationship with Him to follow, have faith, be loved, and show that love. But what does it mean to live out our faith through love?

(SLIDE) First we must realize that faith and love are inseparable.

John’s writings often emphasize the interconnectedness of faith and love blended together. John is an artist in this way, blending beautiful metaphor and prose together to show the depths of faith in action. In 1 John 4:7-21 he directly correlates knowing God with loving one another…

(SLIDE of verse just under title) “**Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God**”. The apostle tells us directly that love is from God, and everyone who loves is of God because “**God is love**”. Therefore, our faith in God naturally leads to an outpouring of love towards both God and our fellow human beings.

(SLIDE) Next we look at the Incarnation and Exemplary Love.

Christ’s incarnation, life, death, and resurrection serve as the ultimate demonstration of God’s love for humanity. Remember I said that John 3:16 shows up at a lot of public and televised events. Here’s why…

God’s love for the world was SO profound that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. There was more than just Jesus’ sacrifice going on at the crucifixion, God also gave something in His love for us - namely, His one and only Son. Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross exemplifies the depth of God’s love and serves as the model for our love towards others.

Our love is NOT self-generated, it is not a random affliction that we are given when we fall into or out of it, rather it flows from the love of God poured INTO our hearts through the indwelling Holy Spirit (SLIDE Romans 5:5).

There’s an age old debate known as Nature versus Nurture. Early Childhood folks will know it well, as may many parents. We know that nature, our nature, is rife with instincts. Those instincts connect to our basic needs: Food, Water, Security, and Desire.

Left unchecked, our instincts will cause us to act to achieve and gather those five things by any means available to us which often include manipulation, or violence. Nurture, however, comes in and tells us that we can obtain those things by other, less evil ways but it takes work, it goes beyond instincts. We can work for our food, we can obtain our security through working together with others through trust, we can find peace in community, etc.

Love, interestingly enough, isn’t our nature - it comes through to us via the Nurture side of things, from God. Love is an action, but it is first felt and taught by God. We only know love when we know it from an outside source, a nurturing source.

(SLIDE) Abide in Christ’s Love.

We heard this morning in our reading of John 15 that Christ calls His Disciples to abide in His love, which is inseparable from obedience to His commands, and this union with Christ is essential for bearing fruit that lasts.

In involves a close and very personal relationship with Christ marked by submission to His lordship and a deepening dependence on His grace. Abiding in Christ’s love also implies an ongoing process of sanctification, whereby the Holy Spirit transforms us more and more into the likeness of Christ, enabling us to love as He loved.

(SLIDE) When we’ve found ourselves in submission to Christ and are abiding in His love…

We can more accurately see the fruits of that act in our lives. Galatians 5 tells us about the fruits of the Spirit which include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

These fruits are not produced through human effort alone, which is where so many get it wrong. These truly come to fruition when we allow the Holy Spirit to do its work in us, and that work gets done when we abide in Christ.

In this way, our love for God and others should present itself in tangible ways, impacting every aspect of our lives and relationships. This is why Jesus emphasized that the world would recognize His disciples by their love for one another (John 13:35).

(SLIDE) Lastly, we look to the Transformational Power of Love.

Echoing my statement from the beginning of this message, love is more than just a sentiment or fleeting emotion… it is a transformational force that has the power to overcome hate, division, and sin.

As Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 13, love is patient, kind, not envious, not boastful, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered, and keeps no record of wrongs. It rejoices in truth, protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. This selfless and unconditional love reflects the very nature of God and stands in stark contrast to the world’s shallow and selfish notions of love.

Notice, all of Paul’s connections to love in 1 Corinthians 13 are connections to actions. Patience is an action… you can BE kind, being envious and keeping records of wrongs requires emotional thought, boasting uses your voice to shout your accolades, selfishness requires actions to take what belongs to others, protection is an act, hope is emotional investment…

For Paul, just as much as Jesus, and for God Himself, love is an action. So when you leave these walls today remember when you say “I Love You” to your spouse or your children that you are declaring an action.

You are telling them you will protect them, be kind to them, help them - your love is an action. When God calls us to serve others in love, it means we are going to be selfless for that person no matter how poor they are. The world sees us by our actions, and our actions are dictated by our love.

So love others, as Jesus loved us… and as God the Father loved Jesus. Let the world see the depths and heights of God’s love in action. AMEN.