

Don't you ever get tired of talking about love?

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Texts: 1 John 5:1-7, John 15:9-17

SCRIPTURE READING 1 John 5:1-7

The connection between God's love for us and our love for others is drawn even more tightly.

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 his 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.

GOSPEL READING John 15:9-17

Jesus continues his farewell message to his disciples the night before his death; he addresses them as friends. What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus?

“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.”

Even though it's not my habit to dwell on commercial holidays like Mother's Day, this year, when we have missed seeing our loved ones so much - when so many have lost loved ones - it seemed important. Maybe, today, we can hear Jesus' words about loving one another through the lens of motherhood.

There are so many ways to love. Parenting is one. Friendship is another. Working for justice is also a way. If you've been in worship recently, you've heard a lot about love. Love, love, love and more love. Maybe you're wondering, doesn't that pastor ever get tired of talking about love? Well, put it another way: Do you ever get tired of being loved? Can you ever feel loved too much? I'm not

talking here about selfishness that pretends to be love to get its own needs met. Even some mothers - sorry to break it to you - even some mothers do that. It can happen in any relationship, but that's really manipulation, not love.

Jesus really had one point to make in his farewell discourse, and he circles back to it again and again. Love. Love. Love some more. But there's one thing that seems off about it; did it strike you, too? Love is commanded. Both Johns repeat it. "This is my commandment: that you love one another." I really don't know anyone who can just love on demand. A friend of mine who happens to be a PK (Pastor's Kid) says she used to fight with her brother when they were young. Well, of course. Siblings fight, right? And their pastor father would come out quoting Jesus to them: "Children, this is my commandment, that you love one another." You can imagine just how well that worked! Strangely enough, my friend became a pastor, too.

I wonder, do women pastors talk more about love? Some of you might remember the days when all pastors were men. I do. It seems to me we heard a lot more about commandments from the pulpit, and a lot less about love, but that may just have been the church I grew up in. Now it's almost the opposite. Love, love, love, every Sunday. Can it be because more women are pastors? I have another woman pastor friend whose little boy was being quite naughty one Sunday. He grabbed her dog collar and was running around the house wearing it -- and nothing else. Did she scold him? No, she picked him up, hugged him and said, "Sweetheart, does this mean you want to be a pastor some day?" He laughed and said, "Oh, mommy, you know boys can't be pastors!"

Maybe women pastors talk too much about love. But Jesus was daring enough to command it. You know, courts can order parents to support their children; they can remove children from the home when neglect or abuse threatens the child's wellbeing. But no one can force a heart to love if love is lacking.

Jesus in John's gospel, and John the letter-writer, were talking to specific people, though: They were talking to Jesus' followers, people who claimed to love Jesus, people who believed that Jesus loved them. In today's Gospel, which, you remember, is set just before Jesus' death, the disciples graduate from servanthood to friendship. The hierarchy, the upstairs/downstairs thing is abolished; Jesus makes them equals now. Love is like the diploma they receive. "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Maybe it's not so much a command as a diagnostic cue for recognizing believers - or for testing their own faith. As Jesus says somewhere else in this final speech, "By this, everyone one will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Is that peer pressure or just a statement of fact?

When I lived in Japan, where only 1% of the native population is Christian, Japanese people just naturally assumed all Westerners were Christian. And they would tell you what that meant: "Ah, you must be Christian. You must be a friend of Jesus Christ." For the few Japanese Christians, their favorite hymn was "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." All of this had strong ethical overtones. I was acutely aware that everything I said or did indirectly told people something about Christianity,

whether I called myself Christian or not. If I was less than honest, less than kind, what did that say about my faith? If I was impatient or rude, if I was less than loving, what did that tell my Japanese friends and co-workers about Jesus?

Oh, my. If we who claim to be friends of Jesus and call ourselves Christian lived by that definition and that standard, we wouldn't need a command to love. In fact, we probably wouldn't need any more laws or executive orders at all. There would be no more poverty, no more inequity. No more war. But I'm not quite perfect yet, and so I don't quite trust that other people are either. Even mothers have their flaws. But there are diagnostic cues that we can trust: Richard Rohr, a contemporary Christian teacher, commented that when he began to be well-known, suddenly a lot of people wanted to be his friend. That's the price of fame! But he realized that the people he truly felt friendship for weren't those who claimed to love him but the people who loved what he loved. Friends are the ones who love what you love.

Can you doubt it? Think of the people who show genuine interest in your children or grandchildren, or in your art if you're an artist, or in your music if you're a musician, or in your field of study if you're a scholar. Doesn't your heart just warm right up to them? Friends of Jesus, friends of God -- they love what God loves. And I believe what the whole Bible is trying to tell us is that God loves everyone everywhere.

I don't love everyone everywhere. Not yet, anyway. I wish I did. I wish I could. What I love about being part of a family of faith like this one is that you are so much closer to that goal than I am. I witness God's fierce love and compassion shining through you, not for recognition or honor or to polish up your business interest, but because that's who you are as friends of Jesus. Loving as he loved, without judgment and without reserve. Never getting tired of loving. Loving as God loves, as a mother loves her children: children too precious to waste fighting or killing each other. Making gardens, not wars. And you give me hope for the world.

I'd like to share with you a litany, a sort of communal prayer, from the Olive Branch Community here in town. Yet another woman pastor friend helped to put it together. As she says, it helps us look at the wideness of God's mercy for the whole world through the lens of motherhood.

[Litany for Motherhood](#) (text is included following the prayers).

Prayers

Mothering God, you give us birth, tend us, watch over us as we blunder, watch with us as we care for our own children and the children of this world - help us to love as you love.

God of peace, may we notice and name all the pieces of your vast creation--plants, insects, stars and seas, and honor them as your children, too.

God of righteousness, help us to remember that your people around the world need a path to health, and clean water, and nutritious food, and opportunities to learn and grow before peace can be achieved. May our withdrawal from military engagement further those ends.

May our words and our deeds always speak clearly of the truth we claim - that we are more than your servants; we are your friends, and we pray in Jesus' name: Our Father...

Litany for motherhood (from olivebranchcommunity.org of Mt. Olive Church, Rochester)

With this litany, we lift up the wideness of God's mercy for the whole world through the lens of motherhood:

To those who become mothers through adoption – **we rejoice with you.**

To those who are pregnant and those who have given birth – **we celebrate with you.**

To those who know the ache of losing a child – **we mourn with you.**

To those in the trenches with little ones every day, and wear badge-of-honor food stains –
we appreciate you.

To those who experienced loss through miscarriage, failed adoptions, or running away –
we mourn with you.

To those who walk the hard path of infertility, fraught with pokes, prods, tears,
and disappointment – **we walk with you.**

Forgive us when we say foolish things. We don't mean to make this harder than it is.

To those who are foster moms, mentor moms, and spiritual moms – **we need you.**

To those who have warm and close relationships with your children – **we delight with you.**

To those who have disappointment, heart ache, and distance with your children –
we sit and sigh with you.

To those who have lost their mothers –
we grieve with you.

To those who experienced abuse at the hands of your own mother –
we believe you.

To those who are tested by motherhood and milestones –
we are better for having you in our midst.

To those who have aborted children –
we remember them and you with love on this day.

To those who mother by loving nieces and nephews, students and neighbors –
we give you thanks for your nurturing.

To those who wish children had been part of the plan –
we mourn that absence with you.

To those who step-parent –
we walk with you on these complex paths.

To those who envisioned lavishing love on grandchildren, yet that dream is not to be –
we grieve with you.

To those who will have emptier nests in the upcoming year –
we pray for your transition.

To those who placed children up for adoption -
we remember you and how you hold that child in your heart.

To all those who love fiercely and completely –
we are grateful for God's compassion and love shining through you.