

Sixth Sunday of Easter

“This is my commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.”

John 15: 9–17

Loving Robbie

There are some people who are easy to love. You want to help them. You're uplifted by their genuine gratitude.

And then there are people like Robbie. Robbie wore out her welcome with the social service agencies a long time ago. Robbie's poverty is real, her life is hard — but she runs through help like water.

The Rev. Lawrence Wood was the pastor of Robbie's local church. Writing in *The Christian Century*, the Reverend Wood remembers one winter Friday when Robbie called the church repeatedly to ask for groceries. The pastor invited her to come to the food kitchen. She didn't have a car — couldn't someone drive some food out her way? “I haven't had anything to eat for four days,” she moaned. Folks who come to the pantry usually take whatever the church has in stock, but Robbie had a shopping list: smoked turkey, lean roast beef and a pound of coffee — decaf.

A bad storm had dumped a foot of snow on the community. The pastor didn't want to saddle someone else with Robbie so late on a Friday, so he went to the food pantry, filled a few grocery sacks and drove the 20 miles out to her place, muttering under his breath the whole time.

Robbie's place was a shambles. No one had shoveled or plowed. Seeing the pastor coming, Robbie stepped out of her door smoking a cigarette. “Did you bring the coffee?” she called out. “Decaf?”

The minister stopped about 20 yards from her door. The snow was deep.

“Could you pull up a little closer?”

“Robbie, just stay there,” the Reverend Wood shouted back and waded through the drifts with one sack, then the other, then the next, feeling the burden on his lower back.

Robbie beamed, but before a conversation could begin, the pastor said, “Well, that’s about it,” and left without asking anything about her or what she might need. It was not one of his better days in ministry.

But Pastor Wood remembers that on the trip home “I did feel lighter. In spite of myself, I felt glad to be of help. And about a hundred yards down the road, I had the odd feeling that when I am judged, it will be by what I do for Robbie.”³

Love one another — it’s not a suggestion but a command. *Love one another* — there are no qualifications, conditions or limitations. *Love another* — even the mean-spirited, the petulant, the ungrateful, the unreasonable. Christ calls us to love as he has loved us: to bring healing and peace into every life we touch.

Continuing last Sunday’s theme of the vine and branches (from his Last Supper discourse in John’s Gospel), Jesus speaks of the love of God as the bonding agent of the new Israel. The model of love for the faithful disciple — “to love one another as I have loved you” — is extreme, limitless and unconditional. The love manifested in the Gospel and the resurrection of Christ creates an entirely new relationship between God and humanity. Again Christ, the obedient Servant Redeemer, is the great “connector” between God and us.

This is the commandment that Jesus entrusts to us who would be his Church: to love one another as Jesus, God made human, has loved us. As Christ gave himself for others, we are to imitate his example of service to others; as Christ brought healing and peace into the lives of those he encountered, we are to bring that same healing and peace into the lives we touch; as Christ revealed to the world a God who loves humanity as a parent loves his children, we are to love one another as brothers and sisters.

Christ also transforms creation’s relationship with its Creator. God is not the distant, aloof, removed architect of the universe;

God is not the cruel taskmaster; God is not the unfeeling judge who seeks the destruction of the wicked. God is creative, reconciling, energizing love — and Jesus is the perfect expression of that love.

All that God has done in the first creation of Genesis and the re-creation of Easter has been done out of limitless, unfathomable, sacred love. Such love invites us to a relationship with God centered in friendship, not fear; such love calls us to put aside our self-loathing over our unworthiness and failings and embrace, instead, a spirit of grateful joy for what God has done for us and in us.

May we see in the Robbies, who wear us down in their demanding neediness, the face of Christ and know that in loving the Robbies around us we express the love of Christ who lived for us, died for us, and rose for us.

Lord Jesus, you have called us your “friends”
and have entrusted to us your work
of compassion and peace.
Inspired by your example of selflessness and
animated by your spirit of humility,
may we love one another,
especially when such love is most difficult,
undeserved, and unappreciated,
remembering that you continue to love us —
despite ourselves.

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