

Easter 6B; Rogation Sunday

May 6, 2018

Ken Wratten at St Luke's

1 John 5:1-6 We love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments.

John 15:9-17 You did not choose me, but I chose you.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples how much he loved them, and how a particular kind of love; agape / sacrificial love - is at the heart of the new relationship he wants us to have with God. He told them to 'abide' in his love, meaning that it is not just a love for them to 'feel', but it is the relationship they are to actively decide to carry at the very center their lives. It is the relationship you and I are to carry at the very center our lives. The way we ACT in life should be defined by our relationship of love with Jesus and with God the Father.

Priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor has written, "God expects us to step up... Knowing God's Word is no substitute for doing it."

So there is a connection for Jesus between his love for God, and being obedient to God; and there is to be a connection for us between our love for Jesus and our obedience to him. His commandments are to love each other in the same way that he loved us; and we are to show the whole world what it means to live by sacrificial love.

This topic of going beyond knowing God's word to doing it, became a major theme for my time here yesterday, for – of all things – the Beer and Wine Stroll. Yes – we provided a place to serve beer, wine, and chocolates (for 250 people!). But we also served water, coffee, peanuts, chips, live jazz music (Tnx David, James, Heidi), a restful place, great hospitality, and some pretty heavy theological discussions. One intense discussion was with someone claiming to not be 'a believer', but trying to deal with people saying they believe, but DO NO Godly ministry. Agape love has to equal DOING loving, caring acts that make other people's lives better (and ours).

I have found that the way God works in my life is not to just give me a gift – like sacrificial love, but he keeps putting 'opportunities' in my path so I can learn the gift. Let me give you an example that developed just this past week.

I got a phone call from Rev Karen Swanson about a mission trip she is making to the Virgin Islands. She is going to spend six weeks there, May 15 – June 28, to help with relief and re-development work that is still going on, following the devastation of hurricanes Irma and Maria seven months ago.

The primary purpose of her trip is to provide relief to clergy in the Diocese of the Virgin Islands who were short-handed before the storms, and like many residents of the VI, have had very little rest the past seven months. Rev Karen will also provide relief for Bp Gumbs from his congregational duties – allowing him time to focus on relief fundraising; she will provide pastoral care to the congregations she'll be serving, and building relationships that will continue beyond her time there. I have asked that Rev Karen come to St Luke's after her trip, to tell us about her experience and the needs there. I am asking that we all prayerfully consider an offering of money toward a discretionary fund for Rev Karen's trip, and that we pray for her throughout her preparation, travel, and work in the Virgin Islands. It is going to be hard work, but Godly work. She called to ask for some financial support. I offered financial help, our prayers, and an on-going connection to her work there, so we can find other ways to help. This is a chance to make her work better, and the lives of people in the VI better, and our own lives better.

Acts of agape love are hard work; and they require a conscious decision. Jesus says that if we do what he commands, his joy will live in us, and in fact, **we will experience a sense of complete joy**. Through this hard work, we can feel a sacred joy.

Jesus says that joy can live in you and me by getting in sync with God; by becoming part of God's team. God has already chosen you, long before you decided to choose Him. **God chose you** to go and bear the fruit of this 'caring for others' form of love.

When we decide to love in this caring way, we are taking on the mind of Christ.

We become more like Christ.

We become children of God, not just followers.

We become friends of Jesus, not just servants.

The command to love people, with the kind of love we have talked about today, **connects us into the limitless energy source of God's love**.

Jesus said, 'remain in my love; obey my command; love each other'.

May we learn how to do this well.

May we teach it to the children and our friends, and show it to this city and the world. **May we experience the promise of complete joy in our lives.**

Amen.