

Worship Service for May 9th: 6th Sunday of Easter - Christian Family Sunday

- **New Testament:** Acts 10:44-48
- **New Testament:** John 15:9-17
- **Psalms:** Psalm 98

Announcements:

- Happy Mother's Day to all our dear mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers. Welcome to our worship service! We're glad you are reading. We pray that God's blessings and peace will be with you all now and forever! Amen.

Sermon Title: Love One Another!

Love is an interesting topic to talk about. It often leaves us wondering what love is really all about. I was watching the movie "Sense and Sensibility," last Sunday and was interested to hear a brief discussion on love. There was this young lady Marianne talking about love to her mum and she said, "*to love is to burn, to be on fire.*" And her examples were Romeo and Juliet, Guinevere and Eloise. And her mum responded and said those people she had mentioned had very pathetic ends. And young Marianne asked her mum "to die for love! What could be more glorious?"

To die for love! What could be more glorious? Right! That question got me thinking about Jesus. The one who died for us because of love. His was not a pathetic end because he conquered death, was resurrected and ascended into heaven. Jesus confirms that to us in our passage this morning when he declares "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus laid down his life for us because he loved us.

Yes! Most or all of us are familiar with the love stories of Romeo and Juliet, Guinevere and Lancelot and Eloise. Yet their love was different from the love of Jesus. Yes, as humans we could die for love; we could go as far as giving our lives to save another person's live from danger. However, all that that does is to save that person from the immediate danger, which is a good and heroic thing to do, but it doesn't give them salvation and eternal life. And that is where we draw the line between Jesus' love and a human's love. The love of Jesus is different because he lays down his life for us not only so our sins can be forgiven but also so that we can obtain eternal life and salvation. The love of Jesus takes care of us both here and in eternity. How wonderful!

Jesus Christ tells us that as the Father loved him, so he loves us. He loves us the same way the Father loved him and that is why he could die on the cross for our sins. Jesus, however, does not end by expressing his love for us. He continues with a command to us to abide in his love and to love one another.

Abide in my love – what kind of love is that? Jesus' love is biblical love and that is the kind of love he is calling us to show one another. Biblical love is “the decision to compassionately, righteously, responsibly, and sacrificially seek the well-being of others over ourselves. Isn't this such a good description of mothers on Mother's Day.

In the early days of the Church, love was the identity of Christian believers. Wayne Meeks, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies in Yale University has written extensively on the growth of Christianity and he mentioned that pagans marveled at the love and sharing that existed among Christians. These pagans commented and said, “see how they love one another.” They described the early Christians to the Roman emperor Hadrian and said “they love one another. They never fail to help widows, to save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something, they give freely to those who have nothing. They do not consider themselves brothers and sisters in the usual sense, but instead brothers and sisters through the Spirit of God. The difference between pagans and Christians was clear as crystal.

Meeks notes how Christians triumphed in the classical world. When epidemics raged, the Christians would care for each other. The pagans would not. The Christians would nurse people outside their community; the pagans would flee. Christians respected women. Girls were allowed to mature before they were married, while the culture around them married off young girls, abused women and subjugated their wives. Along with the Jews, rules of hygiene and moderation provided a healthier community and an example of love and care. Others would see how Christians cared for each other and for them and many converted. People became Christians because their moral way of life was better than that of the pagans and their love for those within and without the community showed a better way, the way of love.

Love one another, Jesus says. It is about time for us to look at ourselves and ask where we are falling short as Christians today. Do we truly love one another, or do we love “our own?” Can we fight for justice for the “stranger” if the injustice is coming from “our own?” Or would we rather support injustice because it is coming from people that we know and love? Can people really feel a sense of belonging in our churches?

If we truly love one another, nothing will stop people from coming to church. How do we welcome the new people that come into our church communities? Do we even welcome them at all, or do we assume that it is the responsibility of others? It is true that these days believers and unbelievers alike are all involved in charity and all other kinds of generous giving.

Where do we now make a difference as Christians? The Word of God tells us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. If we love only those who love us what difference are we from unbelievers? I will go as far as replacing enemies and those who persecute us and encourage us to love those who are different from us. Let us learn to genuinely love those who are from another culture, province, tribe, country or race. For the Bible says that if we say we love the Lord God whom we do not see and we hate the neighbor we see then we do not love God.

The Scripture is not outdated; it is far ahead of everybody. It talks about the end from the beginning and that is why there is no level of civilization, no modernization or digital technology that can make the Scripture become obsolete. Therefore, if God calls us to love and love everyone irrespective of who they are, if we don't obey then we do not love God.

We might struggle and that is normal for we are all used to loving those that we can identify with. Good news is – there is a solution. Jesus Christ describes God as the Gardener in John 15:1 and he Jesus as the vine (John 15:5). And he tells us that he loves us as the Father had loved him – meaning that God the Gardener causes His love to flow through Jesus the vine and into us who are the branches. This helps us to love others like Jesus and the Father.

God's love flows to us and through us and helps us to love those who are different from us or those who reject us. Jesus is calling us to step out of the comfort of the love that we are used to which loves only those we know and have known all our

lives. He is inviting us to extend that love to others. He invites us to abide in him because he is the source of that kind of love. The love that will cause us not to have rest until we help others, until we fight against injustice and racism. When we abide in the love of Jesus, we will be able to love one another as Jesus Christ has loved us. We will be able to look at each other solely as sisters and brothers in Christ as the early Christians did. We will be able to draw others to Christ and to the church and unto salvation and eternal life. Amen.

Prayers

God of our lives and our loving, we thank you for the signs of resurrection that are all around us, showing that life is stronger than death. Give us the grace to recognize and embrace the gifts of new life that your love makes possible for us all, as we pray for your resurrecting power to renew the world amid all its challenges.

Eternal God, in these moments of quiet we thank you for your presence in our lives. We thank you for all of the testimonies of your profound love for your children. We especially thank you this day for the holy one Jesus. We thank you for his humility. We thank you that rather than elevating himself above us he instead would lift us up and as with his disciples call us “friends.” We thank you for his many reminders that we are to love one another. But we confess that we have great difficulty following his command to love.

We become upset with others and find it easier to reject them than to seek to understand and to love them. We struggle with the almost impossible command to love our enemies. We become driven to meet our own needs and become blind to the needs of others. We are driven to succeed which becomes all-consuming and trumps our command to love. Forgive us our foolish ways. Help us to keep in our awareness this command to love which Jesus repeated so many times. Help us especially to hear it in those hard times when it is most difficult to love.

Help us to love others when they are power hungry. Help us to love others when they are inconsiderate. Help us to love others when they are angry and lash out blindly. Help us to love others when they are selfish and insensitive. Help us, O God, to love others so that we may abide in your love and act like the friends of Jesus.

God of home and family, today we thank you for our families, especially for our mothers and grandmothers. We are grateful for their love and attention, their hard work and the deep hope they have cherished for each one of us. We honour before you each mother, grandmother and great grandmother who has died; and we pray for all those who have felt isolated from their families in these months of pandemic. Reunite us in your love.

God of courage and new possibility, today we pray for all those who have felt life or love slipping through their fingers in the times of distancing we've had to endure, and for those who have struggled with their physical or mental health, whatever the reason. We pray for communities trying to sort out how to recover from the pandemic and for all those worried about their personal future. Encourage us with your love.

God of forgiveness and renewal: Today we pray for those whose relationships are in need of repair and for all who work for peace and reconciliation in the face of deep divisions. We pray for families, churches, communities and countries facing conflict, and ask that your Spirit open hearts and minds to deeper understanding. Reconcile us through your love.

Generous God, we bless you for your gift of life renewed through Christ's love. Bless us and the gifts we bring so that our lives may reflect the hope and renewal we have found in Christ throughout our community and in the world you love, in his holy name. As friends and followers of Jesus, we offer the words he taught us: *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Benediction: Go now, and bear fruit for God, fruit that will last. As Christ has loved you, so love one another, and abide always in God is love, that your joy may be complete. And may God give you all you ask for in Christ's name. May Christ Jesus reveal to you God's ways and call you his friends. And may the Holy Spirit confirm the truth within you and make your joy complete. Amen.