

*In the name of our all loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.*

*What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of.* Those of us of a certain age can remember Dionne Warwick singing those Hal David lyrics and Burt Bacharach tune. And probably none of us would dispute her premise. She made it sound so easy.

In the late weeks of the church's observance of Easter, we invariably read passages from the Fourth Gospel, John's version of the Jesus story. We are listening in to Jesus' last words to his disciples before his Passion, as he is preparing to leave them. They are words of admonition, of support, of comfort, of promise. And we also read from the Acts of the Apostles, that account of life in the early Church, also words of support, comfort and promise.

At the core of Jesus' last words were his radically simple take on love: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved 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..."

The words are beautiful, but they require work, intentional work. Certainly the world needs love. But how is one to love as Jesus loved, with the self-giving, outward-looking perspective that Jesus modeled? Jesus did not attempt to define "love" for the disciples. He did not lecture them on it, or preach to them about it. But they learned it, nevertheless, from his example and from being recipients of his love.

Jesus equalizes the relationship between himself and his disciples, you and me. He raises the level of intimacy and calls us friends, not servants. He says to us that we are now equals, no longer in a relationship of overlord and underling, of boss and employee, but as equals, as peers, friends. Jesus is affirming our dignity, and increasing our responsibility in sharing his work.

In friendship, persons often take on the characteristics of one another, sometimes unwittingly. They often copy one another's habits, or speech patterns. Sometimes they dress alike. Perhaps you've heard people comment that dogs begin to look like their owners after a long time. Or that long married couples begin to resemble one another as the years go by. Maybe Jesus was saying that as equals, as his friends, there would be a better chance of our growing into him rather than if the relationship remained imbalanced.

Yesterday we celebrated Confirmation here. It was a glorious service, with more than 375 people in attendance. Nearly 65 people, from three parishes, teens and adults, proclaimed the vows that had been spoken for them in baptism, or were received into this Communion from another tradition. Bishop Smith presided and preached, and spoke at length about his trip to the Congo last year, where he also presided at confirmation services with Bishop Henri Isingoma. He spoke of how life in Christ calls us to new relationship with one another, to loving everyone we meet, because Jesus expanded the understanding of those we were to love to more than friends and family to even strangers and enemies.

He spoke of how living into their Christian faith has enabled persons in the Congo, from different tribes in the North and the South, previously avowed enemies, to transcend their differences and live in peace and love with one another. That Bishop Isingoma preaches that with Confirmation one now belongs to a new tribe, more important than previous ties and bonds, a new tribe in Christ, where each person is a new creation.

If we take Jesus' command to love one another and extend it way beyond our comfort zone, as I believe Jesus is asking us to do, we're in for quite a ride. And it probably won't all be smooth. But I think this is what Jesus is calling us to. Because his measure of love for us is now the standard to which he calls us. And while we don't

have the marked tribal differences and animosities that Christians in the Congo do, there are still many things that separate us from one another, economic standing, sexual orientation, ethnic background, from knowing one another and being in relationship. And it is only when we're in relationship with another can we love him/her.

And it is the Holy Spirit that makes our loving one another possible. The Holy Spirit who moves freely and spontaneously. The Holy Spirit who strengthens and empowers. The Holy Spirit who deepens our understanding of one another and our love for another.

In today's lesson from Acts, non-believers, outsiders, non-Jews were gathered with Peter and his close associates. And the Holy Spirit moved among these persons who were not in the "in crowd", to Peter's and his friends' amazement. The Holy Spirit acted in ways that Peter couldn't imagine, to bring together persons from different tribes and communities into faith in Jesus, into one new community.

The Holy Spirit continues to work among us. As Bishop Smith noted yesterday, the Holy Spirit abides in us, lives in, surrounds us, strengthen us to be the love in the world that Jesus is calling us to be. To be the power for goodness and justice and peace and human dignity, wherever we find ourselves. To be the affirmation of the Gospel by our words and actions.

One of the persons who was confirmed yesterday did so because a colleague evangelized him. The friend first invited, then over a period of time, begged, pleaded, cajoled, and perhaps even harassed this person to come to the Easter Vigil. The confirmand resisted for some time before giving in, perhaps just to get his friend off his back. And once he attended the Great Vigil of Easter, he was "hooked." He began attending church regularly, then was baptized, and yesterday was confirmed. The Holy Spirit continues to work among us. Even when we're not expecting.

So how can we love one another? Live and love by imitation. Jesus contrasts the way of the world—power and violence—with his simple commandment to love, and his model of living, instead, by friendship and love.

Be friends. Make friends. Seek out and live in a community of friends. Enlarge your circle.

Grow. Get interested in your spiritual journey and ask whether you have a set of beliefs that look different from your childish ones. Participate in the Friday Bible Study or in another adult education offering.

Bear fruit, that is, make a difference in the world. Discover the miracle that when you are giving to others, working to change things in this world, your own world gets better, too.

Look for the good in others.

All of this is based on Jesus' words, *abide in my love*. That is, *practice my love*. I do not get from this, be right in my love, but *practice his love*.

*Abide in my love*, he said. I was loved, he was saying. *I loved you, now you love yourselves and others*. AMEN.