

Rev Dr Nathan John Haydon  
St Peter's Episcopal Church, Ladue  
Sermon  
10 May 2026, Sixth Sunday of Easter Year A

### **Collect of the Day**

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass understanding: Pour into our hearts such love of you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

**Assigned Lectionary Readings:** Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:7-18; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

### **Sermon**

The author of our gospel today, St John the Apostle, is a patron saint of authors, booksellers, poison-victims, theologians, the entire region of Asia Minor, and still among many other things, the patron saint of love. While there is some debate about this, he is identified as the disciple whom Jesus loved, and his life seems to bear witness to that — more on that in a bit. He endured persecution and torture, including surviving being plunged into a vat of boiling oil, and was exiled for a time, where in that exile, he received the vision that was the book of Revelation. Even with what he suffered, John outlived all the other apostles and died of natural causes in Ephesus.

While still living, John was the bishop of a church, where his reputation for preaching about love continued to flourish. The ancient translator of the Bible, St Jerome, tells a story about John in one of his Bible commentaries that describes this:

The blessed John the Evangelist lived in Ephesus until extreme old age. His disciples could barely carry him to church and he could not muster the voice to speak many words. During individual gatherings he usually said nothing but, “Little children, love one another.” The disciples and brothers in attendance, annoyed because they always heard the same words, finally said, “Teacher, why do you always say this?” He replied with a line worthy of John: “Because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient.”

“Jesus said, ‘if you love me, you will keep my commandments.’” This moment that we heard in today’s gospel is firmly placed within what is called the Farewell Discourse of Jesus. This is before the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, and as a teacher to his students, he is leaving parting words of wisdom, intending to fill them and give them something to hold on to when the challenges of discipleship arise when their rabbi and Lord makes his departure. Even though this discourse happens before all of these events, we are hearing it now because it perfectly sets us up for the moment of Christ’s Ascension, which is commemorated this Thursday, 40 days after Easter, as well as anticipating Pentecost, 50 days after Easter, with the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate and Spirit of truth we heard about today.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” The apostle John was indelibly formed within the crucible of these words, that even reaching through and across time, trials, and tribulations, he could still proclaim this love without any hesitancy, without any fear, and without any demands. The words of Christ alone should be enough for us, and yet, there will always be that little voice in our heads, that voice that brings doubt and casts confusion, and seeps into our hearts like oil, providing the temptation and excuse to refuse offering it, making our ability to love murky. We look at someone and wonder how exactly this love can be enough — how can it be sufficient if this commandment alone is kept? Allow me to speak to this for a little bit.

There is no mystery here: the reason why it is sufficient, and also the reason why we are unable to do it, gets back to something I just said — it comes down to the way we look at someone. We look at someone, but we don’t see them for who and what they really are. We look at someone, and we render a judgment that is not ours to give. In his book *The Weight of Glory*, CS Lewis says that

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations.

I imagine that some must have difficulty with this quote — it might make us squirm, make us uncomfortable to think of us using the language of “possible gods and goddesses” to describe us. That sounds almost pagan, even blasphemous. But what does Paul say to the philosophers at the Areopagus? He borrows the theology of pagan poets to speak holy truth: not only in God do we live, move, and have our being, but we are more — we too are God’s offspring. God is not an image crafted from mortal art and imagination, but it is the reverse; we are crafted by God, formed in the image of God. That image has been marred; some images are more marred and damaged than others. But the image of God is cloistered within us, and we are trying to spend our lives to let the secret out, to let the true life of resurrection out — a resurrection that could happen only through the all conquering love of God, enthroned within our hearts through the commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.

The priest and theologian Barbara Brown Taylor writes, “Human beings may separate things into as many piles as we wish—separating spirit from flesh, sacred from secular, church from world. But we should not be surprised when God does not recognize the distinctions we make between the two. Earth is so thick with divine possibility that it is a wonder we can walk anywhere without cracking our shins on altars.” Paul practically cracked his shin on the Altar to the Unknown God while in Athens, but of course, God does not live in shrines, and God is not unknown; rather, we are enshrined within God, who is made sanctified within our hearts, when we proclaim the hope of the resurrection to those who still have the image of God imprisoned

within them. If God is love, then we must be love too. So look for the resurrected Lord in all people, just as you would hope that people would look for that in you, and Jesus will be revealed.

Thanks be to God.

AMDG