

Our Redeemer Church

SERMON

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 15, 2022

Preacher: Misael Fajardo Perez

Our gospel text for today includes a huge portion of the text that was read during Maundy Thursday. Jesus commands his disciples to love one another as Jesus has loved them.

If we look at the way Jesus loved, he loved his disciples—even people outside his followers—I would say, to the extreme. Oftentimes we try not to do things to the extreme, but Jesus did love people in an inexplicable and extreme way. Jesus' love embraced and accepted the outcast, the enemy, broke cultural boundaries, and hierarchies.

Jesus modeled for us a type of love that extended beyond the boundaries we humans make. A love that focuses on the well-being of the other, a love that seeks reconciliation, a love that is unconditional.

Jesus demonstrated his intense love for us most clearly on the cross. It was here where we can see what loving to the extreme looks like. Jesus laid down his life for the whole human race. Jesus shows us what a self-sacrificial type of love looks like, which is also embodied in the act of washing of his disciples' feet. A task that only slaves did. He took on the form of a slave, a servant of the household, to point towards this self-sacrificial love.

I find this type of love often in teachers. They really pour themselves out for the life of the students. I have a lot of respect for teachers. Especially during the pandemic, managing a group of kids through the screen, I bet that was not easy.

Jesus came to love the world and to give his life for a world, a world who did not love him back, who condemned him, who did not deserve his love, but a world which was impacted by this act of love on the cross, so that we may know the way God loves us.

Before dying on the cross, Jesus demonstrated an *agape* love by washing the feet of his disciples, including the one who would betray him, including the one who would deny him. *Agape* love is a love that is given to us as a gift. There is nothing that we do that can change this love given to us. This type of love was given even to Judas and Peter, one betrayed him and the other denied him. It is given without merit, without conditions, even when we don't deserve it.

Delmer Chilton, the former bishop of the Southwest California Synod, defined *agape* love as the following: "This is love that has to do with how we act toward one another, not how we feel about each other." This is different from the love we have for a

friend, for a family member, for a spouse. This type of love is one that is hard to extend yet it has the power to transform human relationships, reconcile them, and bring about community transformation.

I often think about Martin Luther King Jr., who delivered sermons on loving your enemies during a time when hate crimes were committed based on one's race. Martin Luther King spoke of Christ's love—*agape* love—in his attempts to break the cycle of hate.

Scripture reminds us today of the way Jesus loved people which crossed all sorts of human boundaries. In the early days of Christianity, there was a lot of anger among believers because there were people accepting the message of Christ. These people were of different cultural backgrounds. People were angry because Peter had fellowship with these outsiders, he built relationships with them, and preached to them! The church was expanding and going beyond the boundaries they have traced, and they were not happy about that.

But what we see in the book of Acts is the Spirit of God at work, through Peter's discernment whether he should be involved in a ministry that included those outside his community of believers, his culture. The spirit of God said to Peter, 'do not make a distinction between you and them.' In other words, let's not use the language of "they" versus "us."

So Peter went, preached the message he had been given, and in the midst of this, he comes to a realization that he had been hindering God from others. Peter said, who was he that he could hinder God?

The Spirit of Jesus manifests itself here in his ministry. Jesus' love was one which always extended to the other without expecting anything in return; it sought the well-being of the other.

This is hard, loving others the way Jesus did, because often we run into this dilemma as humans. We tell ourselves, something like, "well if I am going to put my time, energy, and money in this relationship, what am I going to get out of it?" That is the human tendency of self-focus.

The opposite of this self-focus is "how can I use what I have, things like money, my abilities, my time, to help others thrive, to help my church, my neighborhood, to make sure others have the same resources, that others might have a good quality life, as I do?" That is the love Jesus calls us, one where we give ourselves for the life of the other, for the life of the neighbor, for the life of the enemy, even the one who hurt me and harmed me.

This is a good reminder, first that, it is hard to love and we fail at times (or a lot of the time) to do so. Second, we are reminded to affirm the *agape* love we have experienced and witnessed.

An example of this is Our Redeemer's "Lord's Pantry," which witnesses to this type of love. Another example is Our Redeemer's support to the SHIP house. Our Redeemer

has modeled its ministries on this "*agape*" love which Jesus calls us to extend. As a church, we are always evaluating our relationship with the world to discern needs and opportunities which come to us, so that we can connect with the outer community.

Right before the pandemic, I visited Lutheran Social Services for an event which included a tour of the different places, different sites, in the building. In each of these sites, we heard the stories of people who had been impacted by LSS ministries.

One particular story was told by a former gang member who recorded his journey; he came to a place where he had no money, no resources, and he did not want to go back making money by selling drugs, so he called someone at Lutheran Social Services and they provided him with resources. Right away, he was embraced and loved, and out of that love he was provided a chance to get back on his feet. He was a success story and now this former gang member served LSS as a volunteer.

There is something about being loved, embraced, welcomed by someone without having to gain that love that is so powerful. Often we try to make ourselves worthy to receive this type of love. Jesus calls us today to continue to extend *agape* love, a type of love that is extended without prejudice, a self-sacrificial love, the unconditional love of God.

May God provide us more opportunities to extend the love we receive from Jesus. May God help us to see beyond ourselves and may He forgive us when we fail to do so. Amen