

# Sermon: Easter 6

The Rev. Mike Wernick

May 6, 2018

Year B  
Acts 10:44-48  
Psalm 98  
1 John 5:1-6  
John 15:9-17

On the Meyer Briggs personality inventory... I'm an INFJ... as are many clergy... though among the general population... this particular result is in the minority... INFJ means introverted... intuitive... feeling... and judging... but in this case... judging doesn't mean quite the same thing as being judgmental... in the negative way many of us understand being judgmental... it means that I reach most decisions quickly... some of them seem as clear as writing on the wall... and I'm usually confident about them... about what I want... or about the best way forward... though it also means... that when I don't weigh the pros and cons of some decisions thoroughly enough... I may regret the choice I've made...

But knowing more about how I am... about how I tick... makes it easier for me... sometimes... to let go of outcomes... of letting the preferences of others rise to the top... so if I want to see movie A... and Joel wants to see movie B... it can be easier for me... sometimes... to go with B... after all... it's still seeing a movie... if I want to go to restaurant A... and Joel wants to go to restaurant B... it can be easier for me... sometimes... to go with B... after all... it's still eating out... because my sense of identity... my sense of self-worth... doesn't come from movie A or restaurant A... my sense of self-worth comes from the inside... from being a blessed and beloved child of God...

In today's Gospel... Jesus says... *No one has greater love than this... to lay down one's life for one's friends...* but are we meant to take this only literally... and does Jesus expect this only of himself... or of others... does he refer to nothing more than a willingness to die... the way soldiers might sacrifice themselves to protect their fellow service men and women... or the way a parent would sacrifice him or herself to save

their child... or does Jesus also mean something more than that... something deeper than that...

In John 10:18... Jesus says... *No one takes my life from me... I have power to lay it down... and I have power to take it up again... again...* are we meant to take this only at face value... or does Jesus mean something more than that... something deeper than that... perhaps we can understand that his self-emptying... that he came not to be served but to serve... allows him to die to his ego... perhaps his servanthood allows him to put others first... that he can let his needs die... so that the needs of others come first... that he can let his wants die so that the wants of others come first... that he understands our selfishness... after all... it says in Hebrews 4:15 that we have a high priest who can not only sympathize with our weaknesses... but who has been tempted in all things as we are... so Jesus knows what every one of us faces... he knows every variable that feeds into our choices... and he too asked that if possible... the cup be taken from him...

But maybe he can let go more easily... of the things to which we are attached... because all things came into being through him... he owns all of creation... and he is so rooted in the Ground of Being... he is so at One with the Godhead in every way that that matters... that what rises to the top for him each and every time... the only things that rise to the top for him... are God's needs... God's preferences... and God's will...

And Jesus said to his disciples... *As the Father has loved me... so I have loved you... abide in my love...* for many of us... we take this at face value without going very deep... or we project our own understanding... make our own meaning out of these words... and we may conclude something different than what Jesus meant... so I have to ask... just exactly how did... the Father love Jesus... and just exactly how did... he love the disciples... and the one word... the only word really... that rises to the top for me... is **unconditionally**... he loved them whether they understood what he said or not... he loved them whether they did what he wanted or not... he loved them whether

they betrayed him or not... he loved them whether they denied him or not... he just loved them...

He first showed his love when he incarnates... the Word became flesh and made the choice to dwell among us... taking on all that it means to be human... the stark reality of the human condition... he weeps over Lazarus... he heals the sick... he washes feet... he accepts Judas' love... he comes out of the Garden and hands his life over... and he died and rose again... and all of these things are expressions of love...

Again... Jesus said... *If you keep my commandments... you will abide in my love... just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love... and this is my commandment... that you love one another... as I have loved you...* the Greek verb that's translated as abide... means... *to remain in a state of being...* Jesus then... commands us to love one another unconditionally... and to remain in that state of being which allows love to flow out from us unconditionally... unrestricted...

We learned last week in 1John... that those who say... I love God... and hate their brothers or sisters... are liars... because those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen... cannot love God whom they have not seen... and Ch. 5 in today's Epistle... continues that lesson... when we love God and obey God's commandments... then we also love God's children... that is... all of our neighbors... because without a doubt... what we believe about the Christ Jesus... determines our understanding of love... and our understanding of love determines our behavior...

Sometimes I wonder if we're so caught up with the Divine... that we've forgotten how to be fully human... sometimes I wonder if making ourselves as human... as vulnerable as we can... would enable us to feel the world's pain... the way Jesus did... and we'd be moved to do as much as we can... to heal it... to heal it as a way of honoring the love we've witnessed... sometimes I wonder if the physical walls we want to build out in the world... are really the walls that first exist within our hearts... and which we want to

project out into the world... or onto others... but maybe what we need to do is use the faith referred to in 1 John... to outworld the world... to shift our focus of the world... to God... who loves us unconditionally... and there's a sentiment I heard years ago... about unconditional love... I think it's deceptively simple yet unfathomably profound... and it says... I love you... and it's no concern of yours... and if we can imagine God saying this to us... if we can imagine God expecting nothing from us... in exchange for this love... if we are simply the recipients of God's grace and forgiveness and reconciliation without price... because God already paid that price once for all... then maybe it becomes a bit easier each time... for us to relinquish our lives... our desires... our preferences... in favor of the Other... Holy God... make it so...

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