

6th Sunday of Easter

John 15: 9-17

Hymns: 844, 556 1st 5 vs' +v10, 779, 542, 619, 922.

Introit: Psalm 98.

P Sing a new song to the LORD! For He has done wonderful things.

C His right hand and His holy arm have gained salvation for Him.

P The LORD has made His salvation known.

C He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.

P He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the family of Israel.

C All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

P Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth!

C Break forth, shout for joy, and sing praise!

P Sing praise to the LORD with a lyre,

C with a lyre and the sound of music,

P with trumpets and the sound of a horn!

C Shout joyfully before the King, the LORD!

P Let the sea roar, and all that fills it,

C the world and those who live in it!

P Let the rivers clap their hands,

C and let the mountains shout for joy together

P before the LORD! For He is coming to judge the earth.

All He will judge the world righteously and the peoples justly.

Collect: O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

1st Reading: Acts 10:34-48.

Epistle: 1 John 5:1-8.

Gospel: John 15:9-17.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, John 15:9-17.

9 “As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Remain in My love! 10 If you keep My Commandments, you will remain in My love, as I have also kept My Father’s Commandments and remain in His love. 11 I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 This is My Commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you continue to do what I command you. 15 I no longer call you ‘servants,’ because a servant does not know what his master is doing. However, I have called you ‘friends’ because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from My Father. 16 You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and appointed you that you may go and bear fruit, and that your fruit may remain, so that the Father may give you whatever you ask for in My name. 17 This is what I command you: Love one another!
Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ.

Peace be with you.

Having a true, living faith in Jesus includes observing and believing the totality of His Word. From Genesis to Revelation we possess the holiest of treasures that is the living, active Word of God, and we are commanded to believe and trust in this Holy Word. So it is incompatible with Christian doctrine and the faith to profess Jesus while denying what He says. If there’s anything Holy Scripture makes clear it is this: You

can't have it both ways. No one can claim fidelity towards God while rejecting His commandments as if He doesn't care or looks the other way when a person embraces sin and lives to please him or herself.

There are numerous commands in Scripture. And we could talk about any number of them man wants to overthrow because they are boundaries for the sinful flesh and sinful flesh doesn't like boundaries. But let's look at one command in particular, highlighted today in John's gospel is the simple command to love one another. It's simple from the standpoint it's grammatically clear, and there's no mystery in what God decrees here. We understand it and even claim to believe it. We say "amen" to this Word knowing it's from God Himself—we are commanded by the highest Majesty over heaven and earth to love one another.

This means be kind, be compassionate, be patient, forgive and put the best construction on things.
Sacrifice

for your neighbour, explain everything in the kindest way, bless those who curse you and pray for your enemy. Be salt. Be light. The Word of God is filled with descriptions of the love He demands His people to have. Here in John 15 Jesus gives no description beyond these words: **“love one another as I have loved you.”** We are delusional if we fail to see just what these simple words require. Loving the neighbour as Christ loves us means expressing a perfect love to even those sinners who make our skin crawl. As Christ loves us enough to lay down His life, our love towards the neighbour is to be no different - unconditional and even sacrificial.

People cannot claim to love God and yet hate their neighbour. True faith in God includes faith in His teaching. Love your neighbour as Christ loves you. We would like nothing more, however, if there was a condition to this command, a footnote permitting anger in some cases to those who really tick us off, like, “Love your neighbour only when they love you in return.” That's a command we would sink our teeth into. But there is no such command in Holy Scripture. There are no conditions, no stipulations, no convenient footnotes. The love God demands us to have includes, loving enemies and He doesn't call us to evaluate our neighbour in order to determine whether or not they're really worthy of our love.

It probably goes without saying: loving sinful people is really difficult. For instance, what about that family member who has wronged you so many times and the pain is tremendous - saying *“pastor, you don't understand how bad they've hurt me and they keep on doing it!”* Or you know someone with glaring, obvious faults and problems but they do nothing about them. They are blind to their sin and you're forced to put up with them.

Loving sinners is difficult and you don't need me to tell you that. But this difficulty is exposed in the burning light of God who sees even secret sins. This difficulty we have in loving the neighbour is a reflection of sin only highlighted by God's clear command to love our neighbour as Christ loves us. It's important when dealing with people and dealing with ourselves that we understand the severity of the sinful condition. Easy it is to see the sins of other people; that's not hard to do. It is, however, harder to see our own sins. Why is that?

Well the reason is our own sinful nature is always active and puffs us up to believe we are less sinful than that sinner over there. Sinful pride elevates us above our neighbour, thus highlighting their mistakes while hiding our own.

Surprising? - not really. That's what the Devil does. He puffs us up and our sinful nature blinds us to our own sins yet focuses on those of our neighbour. This is important and crucial to understand as a child of God

because the doctrine of sin explains why loving our neighbour is hard! - yet this is not an excuse to persist in anger and hatred. *“The devil made me do it”* never flies before the living God.

Understanding our own sin helps us better understand the sins of our neighbour, and even aids us in helping our neighbour in their struggles with sin before God. If our neighbour is hard to love because of their sin and we too sin, what then, does this say about us, especially as we stand before a perfect, holy God?

The words of Jesus, **“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you”** reveals the love God has even for sinful creatures. The Father's love for the Son is perfect and pure. The Father loves His Son who is obedient to do the will of His Father even if it means dying on a cross to redeem fallen humanity. This

relationship within the Holy Trinity between Father and Son is one of bliss, tranquillity, harmony and, again, perfect love, an everlasting love - a love so great it transcends our thinking. In the glorious Word of Christ we hear that as the Father loves His Son, the Son loves us. His love for us is perfect, pure and unconditional. The greatest expression of divine love is Jesus laying down His life for us. He does this out of obedience to the Father; He does it out of love for you and me, out of love for the world. He dies to save sinners, including you and I.

There are no strings attached, - no return-payment on our part. Christ lays down His life willingly because He is love and actively shows that love by dying even when we, - as enemies of God, did nothing to merit this gift. That's the thing about the crucifixion of Jesus - He does it out of love for sinners who by their very nature want nothing to do with God's mercy and compassion.

Our neighbour doesn't deserve love from God, but neither do we. Yet Jesus still showers us with the same love shown by the Father to the Son. In Christ by faith we receive an unconditional love covering our sin, imputing to us the very righteousness of God Himself. When we struggle to love our neighbour and even pray to God for help with this sinful struggle that we confess is there, - the good news is even the sin of our imperfect love is covered by Christ and His perfect love manifested in His suffering, death and resurrection.

Our works of love are only perfected and purified because of Jesus and His loving work to save sinners. By remaining in His love means living by faith in His promise that He is the Lamb slain for yours and my sin. The sins that horrify us, even those sins of struggling to love our sinful neighbours, even the sins of ourselves that appear so bad we question whether or not we have God's love - Jesus' love, for us is the love shown by the Father to the Son.

It's a love that is so perfect, pure and everlasting. It's a love that blots out sin by the shedding of holy, innocent blood. This is the love Christ has for us. He died for us and calls us to be loving and to be kind because as His child you are one already loved and forgiven even now. Remember this love, the love of Christ Jesus. A love showered upon us. A love ours by faith. A love no different than the love shown by the Father to the Son. **Amen.**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

3rd Hymn: 542,

Prayer of the Church 6th Sunday of Easter

P Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief Silence

P Lord God, heavenly Father, we offer before You our supplications for the well-being of Your Church throughout the world. Send Your Holy Spirit into the all the world to testify to Him who came by water and blood. Open the ears of all who hear the Gospel that they may receive it with joy and comfort and truth.

Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Preserve our nation in peace and integrity, look with favour upon Your servants who care for us, especially police officers, firefighters, those in the armed services and other emergency workers, doctors and nurses. We thank You for giving these servants to serve and protect us, and we ask You to keep them from all harm and danger. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Lord of the nations, abide with all those to whom You have given authority over us, especially our Federal and State Governments , and all who make, administer, and judge our laws. Guide them that they may seek to use their authority not for personal gain but to care for us and keep our society safe. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Guide us in our various vocations so that we may never forget that You are at work in us and through us help us to love and serve our neighbour, and that You provide for us all that we need for body and soul.

Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P At Your gracious invitation, we come to Your Table to eat and drink Your holy body and blood. Let us find favour in Your eyes to receive this holy Sacrament in faith for the salvation of our souls and to the glory of Your holy name. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Comfort all who are in sorrow or need, sickness or adversity (*especially _____*). Grant them healing, according to Your will, or give them strength to bear their afflictions in courage and hope. Bring consolation to those in sorrow, and bring us all to the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has overcome death. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Heavenly Father, in Your Son You chose us and appointed us to go and bear fruit in the world. May we never doubt that whatever we ask in His name, You promise to give. All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever.

C Amen.

4th Hymn: 619,