

## Loving as Jesus Loved—John 13: 31-35

*May 22, 2022- 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter*

What do you feel you can say about love? Love is one of the most used, abused and manipulated words in the English language. “Love, it’s what makes a Subaru a Subaru”. What does that even mean?! Love is used to justify abusive relationships. Love of country is used to justify all kinds of horrors. Love is the most common theme in popular music, sometimes profoundly so, Neil Young’s “Love is a Rose”— “Love is a rose, but you better not pick it, it only grows when it’s on the vine, a handful of thorns and you know you’ve missed it, you lose your love when you use the word mine.” Sometimes not so much, “Love stinks, yeah, yeah” that contribution brought to us by the J Geils band. The word love is so used and abused that many would say that it has lost the ability to define anything real, tangible, and meaningful. I’ve heard people say that even in the context of faith, which is a shame because love is at the core of the Jesus way. Our faith story this morning is very explicit about what it means to love.

Jesus’ counsel to his disciples and to us is based on his experience of love: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." It’s very specific isn’t it? Love one another, as I have loved you. John the gospel writer doesn’t leave us guessing—he invites us to use Jesus’ life as a model of what true love looks like. There is one major event and one teaching that go a long way toward summing up the way Jesus loved. The event is the washing of the apostle’s feet where Jesus foregoes the status of master for the sake of service. The teaching comes later in John’s gospel: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."<sup>1</sup> To love as Jesus loved is to let go of something valued and precious in order that you may lay down your life for another.

We are left as always with the question of what this means for us in our time and place. What does it mean to lay down our lives for others in our relatively comfortable, peaceful country? Rarely will that actually necessitate physically dying for another. The lesson of love in Jesus’ life is that there can be no love without death of some kind; True love hurts, we let go of something treasured and precious for the good of another.

We see this in some of the larger societal issues of our time. Love for creation (which includes us) is asking us to let go of the comforts, conveniences, and lifestyles of a throw away, fossil fuel addicted, consumerist society. For white people, love of our Black, Indigenous and neighbours of colour is asking us to unlearn and re-learn our history, to examine our institutions, practices, and language for ways that we exclude and marginalize. Love asks us to let go of something treasured and precious for the sake of another.

You know this applies to our everyday interactions as well. Think of the parent, every stage of a child’s development is a cause for celebration and grief. We want to hang on

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<sup>1</sup> John 15: 13

to them as they were, knowing those moments will never come back, but because the parent loves the child they let go of that desire. Perhaps you've put a career on hold, sacrificed income and status to stay home with your children. Anyone who has looked after a sick or dying loved one knows this. For the sake of a spouse, a parent, or a child you let go of your freedom, you put plans on hold; you might even quit a job. I think of my parents who let go of their fear, friends, family, and culture in order to immigrate to Canada and provide their children with opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have had. I think of the boys who after my oldest son's brain surgery offered to wear helmets during recess if my son would be required to do so in order to protect his vulnerable head.

This brings us to a paradox of the kind of love Jesus lived, a seeming contradiction that is in fact true: Love hurts and that hurt is the source of our healing. Joseph Campbell, one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century, an expert on mythology and religion shared a story that helps to illustrate this paradox. Campbell re-counts a story of an overlook on a mountain road in Hawaii with a steep drop off, a place where despondent, desperate people sometimes go to end their lives. Campbell goes on to say,

One day, two police were driving up the...road when they saw just beyond the railing that keeps the cars from rolling over, a young man preparing to jump. The police car stopped, and the (officer) on the right jumped out to grab the man but caught him just as he jumped, and he himself was being pulled over when the second officer arrived in time and pulled the two of them back. Do you realize what had suddenly happened to that officer who had given himself to death with that unknown youth? Everything else in his life had dropped off – his duty to his family, his duty to his job, his duty to his own life – all his wishes and hopes for his lifetime had just disappeared. He was about to die. Later, a newspaper reporter asked him, "Why didn't you let go? You would have been killed." And his reported answer was, "I couldn't let go. If I had let that young man go, I couldn't have lived another day of my life."

Campbell proceeds to ask rhetorically, 'How come?' He says that moments such as he describes strip away all the barriers of separation between people and in an instant the realization dawns that you and that other are one, that you are two aspects of the one life. Our true reality is in our identity and unity with all life.<sup>2</sup> It is true of life-saving situations, it is true of raising children, it is true of caring for aging parents, it is true of right relations and anti-racism work.

The kind of love Jesus talked about and lived hurts, but it also heals. I wonder if that's why the definition has been so elusive. We would rather obfuscate; we would rather settle for something more superficial and sentimental to avoid pain. But in so doing we forego the transformation that leads to healing. The love that Jesus lived heals because it connects us to each other. When we give up something treasured and precious for the

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, p. 110.

sake of another, we experience life as God experiences life, not as a bunch of parts trying to make it on their own but as a connected whole—interconnected and interdependent. It is to participate in something greater than yourself.

For followers of the Jesus way what it means to love is clear—to love as Jesus loved is to lay down your life for the sake of the other daily, sometimes in big ways but more often in little, everyday ways. That will be the source of our healing, our joy, and our meaning. It's like that other Christian paradox, it's losing your life in order to gain it. May we be blessed in this way.