

**The 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter: Holy Trinity Church: May 6, 2018**

**John 15: 9-17: *We Are to Love One Another As God Loves Us***

**Preached**

**By**

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**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**I would like to begin with one of the most beautiful love stories that I know. It is the story of the courtship of Moses Mendelssohn, the grandfather of the great German composer, Felix Mendelssohn. Moses Mendelssohn was a small man with a misshapen, humped back. One day he visited a merchant in Hamburg who had a lovely daughter. Though Mendelssohn admired her greatly, she avoided him, seemingly afraid of his grotesque hump. On the last day of his visit he went to tell her good-bye. Her face seemed to beam with beauty, but when he entered, she cast her eyes to the floor. Mendelssohn's heart ached in love for her. After some small talk, he slowly drew to the subject that filled his mind. "Do you believe that marriages are made in Heaven?" he asked. "Yes," replied the young woman. "And do you?"**

**“Of course,” Mendelssohn answered. “I believe that at the birth of each child, the Lord says, ‘That boy shall marry that girl.’ But in my case, the Lord also added, ‘but alas, his wife will have a terrible hump.’ “At that moment I called, ‘Oh Lord that would be a tragedy for her. Please give me the humped back and let her be beautiful.’” We are told that the young woman was so moved by these words that she reached for Mendelssohn’s hand and later became his loving and faithful wife. Isn’t that a beautiful story? Hold on to it. We’ll come back to it in a few moments.**

**I want to pose 3 questions for you to consider. The first question is this: where does love come from? Now some of you would answer, that’s easy. Love comes from within. It’s something that happens naturally as we mature as human beings. Is that true? I’m not so certain. For example, little babies are the most lovable creatures in this world, but that doesn’t mean that they are born full of love and a kind spirit. Don’t let those innocent smiles fool you. If they were that kind and loving, they wouldn’t wake you at two in the morning demanding to be fed or their dirty diaper changed. The truth is that small babies are born totally self-centered. That doesn’t mean they’re bad. Babies aren’t by nature bad. They are simply and totally helpless. In order to survive in this world they must make their needs known loud and clear. If you meet those needs, then a baby will probably grow to love you. But, is that really**

love? We say that children have to be taught to hate, but isn't that true of love as well? Just think about this, how difficult it is to teach a child to share. Is it really something that happens naturally? Is it something that comes from within? Or is it something we learn as infants and then as children, first of all, from our primary caregivers and then from those around us?

The Greek word for God's love is *agape*. Translated from the ancient Greek, 'agape' is 'gift love.' The goal of gift love is to enrich and enhance the person whom we love rather than to extract something we need from them. Gift love moves out to bless and to increase rather than to acquire or to diminish. God's love is all about agape, gift love. In other words, God's love is gift love, not need love. This is the meaning of *agape* love, God's love.

Here is the challenge in our Gospel reading from John today. Are we capable of *agape* love? That is, loving as God loves you and me? To a certain extent we are, but this does not happen naturally for human beings. For us to substitute gift love for need love, we must go to the source of love and the source of all love is God. Jesus says in our Gospel reading for today, "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you . . .*" Love, then, doesn't come from within, it comes from above unless, of course, God lives within us. Later, in his first

**epistle John will unpack this truth further when he writes, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.”**

**So, that is the answer to the first question: where does love come from? It comes from God. Then John adds, “*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*” (1 John 4:7-11).**

**This brings us to our second question: What does love look like? “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him . . .”**

**I said we would return to that beautiful story of Moses Mendelssohn, the small man with the large hump on his back. Remember he told the girl he loved, “I believe that at the birth of each child, the Lord says, ‘That boy shall marry that girl.’ But in my case, the Lord also added, ‘but alas, his wife will have a terrible hump.’ “At that moment I called, ‘Oh Lord, that would be a tragedy for her. Please give me the humped back and let her be beautiful.’”**

**So, my sisters and brothers in Christ, what does love look like? Love looks like a man taking on a hump on his back so that his beloved can be straight and**

beautiful. But instead of a hump, let us say, as we think of the message of the Gospel, it is like a man who takes a cross upon his shoulder so that you and I might be free from the power of sin and death. Do you hear what I'm saying? Gift love is like a man hanging on a cruel cross suffering simply and solely because of God's love for us. We can't meet any of God's needs or even God's commands. But God's nature is to give love.

Again, what does love look like? Let me tell you another love story. It looks like a young guy and a young girl who fell in love. But the guy came from a poor family. The girl's parents weren't too happy about that. So the young man decided not only to court the girl but to court her parents as well. In time, the parents saw that he was a good man and was worthy of their daughter's hand. But there was another problem: The young man was a soldier. Soon, war broke out and he was being sent overseas for a year. The week before he left, the man knelt down on his knee and asked his lady love, "Will you marry me?" She wiped a tear, said yes, and they were engaged. They agreed that when he got back in one year, they would get married. But tragedy struck. A few days after he left, the girl had a major car accident. It was a head on collision. When she woke up in the hospital, she saw her father and mother crying. Immediately, she knew there was something wrong.

She later found out that she suffered a brain injury. The part of her brain that controlled her facial muscles was damaged. Her once lovely face was now disfigured. She cried as she saw herself in the mirror. “Yesterday, I was beautiful. Today, I’m a monster.” Her body was also covered with so many ugly wounds. Right there and then, she decided to release her fiancé from their promise. She knew he wouldn’t want her anymore. She would forget about him and never see him again. For one year, the soldier wrote many letters, but she wouldn’t answer. He phoned her many times but she wouldn’t return his calls. But after one year, the mother walked into her room and announced, “He’s back from the war.” The girl shouted, “No! Please don’t tell him about me. Don’t tell him I’m here!” The mother said, “He’s getting married,” and handed her a wedding invitation. The girl’s heart sank. She knew she still loved him, but she had to forget him now. With great sadness, she opened the wedding invitation. And then she saw her name on it! Confused, she asked, “What is this?” That was when the young man entered her room with a bouquet of flowers. He knelt beside her and asked, “Will you marry me?” The girl covered her face with her hands and said, “I’m ugly!” The young man said, “Without your permission, your mother sent me your photos. When I saw your photos, I realized that nothing has changed. You’re

still the person I fell in love with. You're still as beautiful as ever. Because I love you!"

Beautiful story, isn't it? So, where does love come from? Love comes from God. We cannot make ourselves ugly enough that God will not love us. What does love look like? It looks like a man nailed to a cross, not because of anything we can do for him, but simply because he loves us so much. And that brings us to the final thing to be said about love today.

The third question is, what does such love require from us? Jesus answers that question in our Gospel reading from John, We don't often think of Jesus issuing commands, but he does here: "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you."

We are to love others as he has loved us, not with need love, but with gift love. Not because of anything they can do for us, but because of what Christ has done for us. The world says "Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Christ says to do good for people who are incapable of doing anything for you in return. That is gift love, *agape* love, it is the love of God.

Our challenge is quite simple, what does such love require from all of us? It requires us to move beyond our needs love to agape love, to gift love to God's

**love. To look around at others who are in need of God's love and to give it to them not asking what they can do for us, but remembering what Christ has done for us. "This is my command," Jesus says to you and me, his disciples: "Love one another." AMEN.**