

## “LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.”

A sermon for May 6, 2018, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba  
The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Gospel: **John 15:9-17**

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 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. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

One of the best-known of Michelangelo's works of Art is found on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In part, it depicts God reaching down to touch Adam's fingertip to give him life. The viewer marvels at this masterpiece, so painstakingly done. The genius in this artwork comes from the powerful depiction of God's love that stretches out to redeem sinful humanity unconditionally. When one sees it, one is moved to praise it saying, *What a masterpiece! What an artist!*

As I have told you before, love is an indefinite thing; we can't explain it in words. During one of my usual interactive sermons, at Holy Apostles Lutheran in the southwest suburbs of Chicago, I remember asking the congregation the question, “*What is love?*” Of all people, a teenager, so young to understand love, answered in a girlish voice saying, “***Love is passion.***”

People turned around to look at her. They were surprised by the answer. We know that love implies tender feelings of affection. It is an expression of liking for someone or something. It is goodwill.

Sometime back I explained to you that the Bible does not define LOVE, rather it lists the attributes of love. *1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 8a* says:

- *Love is patient or kind.*
- *Love is not jealous.*
- *It is not arrogant or rude.*
- *Love does not insist on its own way.*
- *It is not irritable or resentful.*
- *It does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right.*
- *Love bears all things; believes all things; hopes all things.*

In real life, love creates friendships among people. It is act of self-surrender. In no other place are expressions of love found in such plenty than in music. Let's see what musicians have to say about love:

- *'You are the only one....'* A singer rejoices for the love he has found.
- *'How I am I supposed to live without you?'* A lamentation for a lost love.
- *'I cry over you (or for you.)'* An expression of hope for a love yet to come.

Listing a few of the various types of love is an easy thing to do.

1. Let us begin with Brotherly Love (**Philos**) from which the word philanthropy is derived. But what is it? **Philos** may refer to the love for a fellow human being because of common humanity. It is a love for fellow man. It falls under the Golden Rule: "*Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.*" One way of explaining brotherly love is that it seeks to **acknowledge the image of God** in another person.

2. **Crush.** (A form of Eros) The 'crush-feeling' for another person is not really love. It is like placing someone on a pedestal, thinking that he or she cannot do wrong.

3. **Obsession** (or **Addictive Love**) (A form of Eros): I hesitate to associate 'obsession' or 'addictive obsession' with **love** because it **seeks to control**. Obsession can lead to sexual assault and murder.

4. **Tough Love:** Tough Love is not really a *feeling* you can call love, rather it is *disciplinary in nature*. It is used to help someone change his or her behavior by means of teaching some principle.

There are lessons for both 'teacher' and 'pupil' in practicing **Tough Love**. The teacher must learn to be firm and not give in so that the pupil will learn to help himself or herself. The pupil is taught how to take charge of his or her own life. Using 'tough love,' the teacher must require the pupil to learn to deal with a particular issue from the position of either '**swim or sink**'. When the swimmer 'rises from the deep,' it is a win-win for both individuals.

**5. Unconditional Love** (Agape) is **the ultimate love. It is divine.**

On the human level it can occur naturally -- it is maternal. However, it is mainly **attributed to God**. It is the **ultimate love! Jesus says, "No One Has Greater Love than to Lay Down One's Life For One's Friends."**

Unconditional love doesn't look for perfection! Unconditional love **doesn't have to approve of or agree with someone's bad choices**. The first thing God does, is to ignore our wrong doing and accept us as we are. **God loves us without patronizing** what is **unlovable**.

Most of the time, human love is conditional. We 'love' because we want something in return, some profit. For example, we may give aid to poor countries so that we

can exploit their natural resources and enrich ourselves. So, there are strings tied to this 'so-called' aid. **God loves us unconditionally. He “gives rain and sunshine to the wicked and to the righteous” alike.**

Jesus said that other people (or non-believers) will recognize that we are Jesus' disciples **not** by our miracles, or our faith, or our good works but **“by our love for one another.”** We cannot love God unless we love each other.

Sometimes we must live with an unusually difficult person, offering them this same unconditional love. **Love IS the priority** which leads us to a **predicament**. Jesus loved us ... **freely, sacrificially, graciously**. He set an example for us to follow. **We must love one another.**

**“If you love me you will keep my commandments.”** This means that our love for Jesus can be demonstrated as we keep his commandments. There aren't many commandments that Jesus ever gave. His commandments are summarized in one word, **LOVE**. The commandment to love is also found in the Law of Moses saying: **“... Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all mind, with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.”** Jesus adds these words: **“... love one another just as I loved you.”**

I say it once again ... other people will recognize that we are Jesus' disciples, not by our miracles, or our faith, or our good works but **“by our love for one another....”** We cannot love Jesus or God unless we love one another. The Lord says, **“As I loved you.”** How did he love us? By **‘laying down his life’** for us. As Jesus puts it, **“There is no greater love than this, that a man lays down his life for his friends.”** Of course, he is referring to his death on the cross.

Not many of us will be asked to lay down our lives for another. Body guards are trained to 'take a bullet' to protect the president or someone in authority. They do this not because they **love** the person they protect. They do it because it is their duty. The promise of good payment and benefits for their family puts them in this predicament.

Jesus laid down his life compelled by his love. **“No greater love than this ... that a man lays his life for his friends!!”**

Friendship in Jesus involves self-giving and consent. Jesus says, **“I have called you friends.”** Christians are friends of Christ and friendly to one another as a community of believers. Christian love for one another involves reciprocating love for love by walking the walk. Friends relate, communicate, and know the likes and dislikes of the other. Love brings unity. Members of the Christian community are one in unity.

Christian love in Christ bonds together people who are *culturally diverse, ethnically and geographically different*. The Christian bond is divine. Believers are not kin, not a tribe, not a nation. They are more than surrogates because they are divinely

ordained to love one another. Believers are a mystical community sharing one common name -- Christians.

We acquired this new name from Christ. He laid down his life for us. He also said we will be known to be his disciples if we love one another as he loved us.

Jesus also said, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain....*" We were *chosen, ordained* and *sent forth* to bear fruit that remains.

One fruit, to be sure, but with multiple flavors. It tastes of mango, orange, pear, peach, passion fruit ... all in one. The fruit represents "*love, joy, peace; long-suffering; kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" (Galatians 5:22-23)

Let us love one another and bear fruit that remains.

**Amen!**