

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"The Power of Friendship"
Dr. J. Dent

May 13, 2012
6th Sunday of Easter
Christian Family Sunday

On this weekend and in this last week much has been devoted to being grateful for your mother as today is Mother's Day. We tend to downplay Mother's Day and Father's Day in our denomination in favor of continuing teaching on Easter and focusing somewhat on the Christian Family. Please note that we do want you to appreciate your mother, whether she is alive or not, and we want you to receive appreciation for those of you who have had the privilege of being mothers, both in the physical sense and in the spiritual sense of mentoring and caring for others in a motherly way.

This is not to say that mothers are always wonderful or that we all should put them on a pedestal as I heard this week on the radio. Mothers make mistakes and have sins in their lives just as fathers have. Sometimes it appears that the culture tells us mothers need to be praised and fathers need to be corrected. Perhaps it is the time we are living in. Perhaps I am not seeing it right. I welcome your thoughts later.

In many ways, this week we continue to consider what it means to love one another. In the Gospel of John we read, "Love one another" is Jesus' command. And I believe the reason for the command to love is the basic need for love that we all have. God has built into us such a need. It pulls us away from loneliness, narcissism and individualism to community, friendship and family. How much do we need others? Who we would contact if we were in the last moments of our lives, who would you call?

This was certainly one of the questions on the minds of passengers on United Flight 93 on September 11th, as they had heard about at least some of the other three jets that had been used as bombs against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Who would I call if I only had a few moments left?

Some of us would call our spouse, or our mothers or fathers, our close family members, or perhaps our closest friend. A crisis often sharpens the mind so that we must make a quick decision. In those few moments, passengers called loved ones. What would you say? Perhaps you might say,

“I love you, and make sure so and so knows that I love them too.” It’s the kind of comment that summarizes our deepest connection.

Today’s a good day to tell your mother that you love her (if you do).
Today’s a good day to tell anyone close to you that you love them.

Jesus and John tell us that one of the highest priority teachings in Jesus’ last few days on the earth was about loving one another. Jesus knows about the family being the first community into which we all are born, even orphans and those who tragically lose their closest family members in life. The family is the first community. Secondary communities then are our neighbors, our social groups, our church, our schoolmates, our work partners, and so on. Jesus wanted to make sure we understood the importance and centrality of the family of God. He wanted us to know how much he loved us.

He also wanted to establish how he was loving us as a model for how we should be loving each other. “Love one another as I have loved you.” (15:12) How did he love his disciples? How did he love the crowd? He gave them time. He listened. He told them the stories that would help them understand the new movement of God that we now call Christianity. He corrected error. He cared for people in pain and loss. He brought life and hope and healing wherever he could. He was hard on those who felt they didn’t need any help or direction. But he would still talk to and try to reason with the religious leaders and those who would ultimately ask for him to do be tortured to death. Even when he was being beat up, he seemed composed and peaceful, reasoning with the guard who had struck him.

So we too have much to learn in being patient with others close to us. We too have much to learn about how to communicate in respectful and kind ways, even when we are tempted to be mean and hurtful, in response to mean and hurtful comments. We need to be able to be creative in expressing ourselves with those whom we disagree. The temptation is simply to go silent for some of us. For others of us, we say things we regret later. Finding that middle way of appropriate comments with good tone can be something difficult to achieve.

Also Jesus makes four more points about loving. The first is that true loving requires a measure of sacrifice. He most literally did this for us on the cross. Now we are called to give up our time to care for others. This ideally comes

from a desire to seek the other person's best, from wanting to help that person become the best person they could ever be. These traits often are seen in wonderfully creative ways in healthy mothers. We remember again the biblical principle that we only get to keep what we give away. If we give away our lives and our time to others, we are assured by God that we have a treasure that we might not see now, that many others may not see at all. But God sees. He knows what you have given, what you have given up for the sake of others you love. God knows.

The second teaching on love Jesus gives is that true love agrees with God's teaching. (15:13) God says you are his friend if you follow what he says. This is in opposition to today's cultural teaching of "anything goes." The culture says, "Have it your way," or "Do what you please, as long as you don't hurt someone else." But Jesus teaches that true love falls in line with God's principles: trust God, honor God's name, make sure you get appropriate rest daily, weekly, monthly, yearly; respect your parents; resist rage and respect others; stay faithful to the person you are with; respect other's property; tell the truth, even when it hurts; respect others' relationships. These are the positive forms of the ten commandments.

The third teaching on love Jesus gives is that true love discloses what's going on, it doesn't hide. (15:14) Jesus says that he used to treat his disciples as servants. Servants are just hired hands that don't really know the reasoning behind the executive decisions. But now Jesus lets us in on all of it. So it is with love. If we hold back where we are inside, and try to hide from those we love, we are choosing not to trust and retreating from community. It takes courage to disclose what's going on inside. God wired us so that we can choose to reveal what's going on inside or not. And we can thank him that we don't have the ability to read other's minds. As we listen to Jesus, read the Scripture and understand more of what he wants in our lives, we grow in friendship with him and know the power of his friendship in the totality of the rest of our life and relationships.

The fourth teaching that Jesus brings to the discussion of love, particularly divine love, is that he initiates relationship with us. It is up to us to respond. Will we respond with fear and rebellion, or will we say "yes" with all that we are? A long time ago in the '70s in the U.S., there was a public evangelism campaign that had people putting bumper stickers on their cars that said "I found it!" This was meant to pique the curiosity of other drivers hopefully. The question was supposed to be raised: "What did he or she

find?" The answer was supposed to be salvation from sin, or a relationship with Christ. The problem is that the Bible talks a lot more about God choosing us, waiting for us as the father of the prodigal son did, loving us. So the bumper sticker should have said, "God found me" instead of "I found it."

Jesus wants us to be like a fruit tree that has such wonderful, sweet fruit on its branches that no one can resist come closer and trying out that amazing fruit. Now I don't know if you've picked much fruit off the tree and ate it right there wherever the tree is. But it is a whole different experience than buying something in the grocery store and hoping that it's good when you get home. Sweet cherries, juicy peaches, ripe apricots, and even the nut trees: like walnuts and almonds, once you've eaten them fresh, you won't be very happy with what you buy in the store. Jesus says that our faith and our love should be as attractive as that fruit tree. And once others know the sweetness of that faith and trust, they too will want the same for the rest of their lives. And when we trust God like that, only desiring what God wants, we join God in God's activities and he gives us the desires of our hearts. That is a taste of heaven. That is true love.

Let us pray.