



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick

6th Sunday of Easter, May 16, 2020

Sermon Title: "Unbreakable Love"

Gospel Text: John 14:15-21

There's a scene in the book, *Little Women*, in which one of the characters, Amy, falls through thin ice while skating. How we get to this moment is that Amy and her sister Jo have been at each other's throats- struggling, sacrificing and fearing they will lose their father who is off serving in the Civil War. Meg, Jo, Amy and Beth, the little women, and their mother are left at home. When a wealthy and interesting neighbor, Laurie, moves in next door, Amy and Jo are vying for his time. Jo is invited to go to a play with him. Amy wants to join, but in big sister fashion, Jo declares she is not invited. Afterwards, Jo discovers that the manuscript for a novel she was writing has been destroyed by Amy in her anger at being excluded. Jo professes she will never forgive Amy, which sounds like such a final break. Later, when Jo and Laurie go ice skating, Amy tries to follow. When Laurie warns Jo that ice is thin in the middle, Jo does not pass on the message to Amy, coming behind. That's when the ice breaks, Amy falls in to frigid water and Jo falls into despair, frozen in the moment.

But, Laurie grabs a branch, reaching out to a flailing Amy. Then, Jo grabs onto Laurie and little by little they become this heaving chain of humanity, linked in a common purpose, determined Amy will not be lost. Fortunately, they succeed. Later, as Jo talks with her mother about her temper and struggle with forgiveness, she sees her Mother as acting the way she "ought to." But her Mother tells how it really is, "Watch and pray, dear, never get tired of trying, and never think it is impossible to conquer your fault...Don't cry so bitterly, but remember this day, and resolve with all your soul that you will never know another like it. Jo, dear, we all have our temptations, some far greater than yours, and it often takes us all our lives to conquer them. You think your temper is the worst in the world, but mine used to be just like it. I've been trying to cure it for forty years, and have only succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life."

The patience and the humility of the face she loved so well was a better lesson to Jo than the wisest lecture, the sharpest reproof. She felt comforted at once by the sympathy and confidence given her. The knowledge that her mother had a fault like hers, and tried to mend it, made her own easier to bear and strengthened her resolution to cure it, though forty years seemed rather a long time to watch and pray to a girl of fifteen.'

In our lives we can hear or decide what "ought to be" and become disheartened by the reality of "what is." We can hear what we are to do, to keep Jesus' commandments to love, but cannot fathom how we will ever do so continually without a break.

Jesus makes clear that all he asks of his disciples is to embrace the love he has lived among them in their lives. This love may seem fragile as it is lived out in the gap between what "ought to be" and what "is."

We can probably all think of situations where we are faced with the gap between what ought to be and what is, where the world feels like it will break. That was true before our current time, but perhaps we feel it keenly now. We worry about being left out, or fear that it is "us against the world." When we feel powerless or alone, our tendency is to act for self-interest first, perhaps in anger, or haste, or despair. We often do not see the real danger of this until it is all too present before us, as the world we were thinking ought to be is suddenly upended. When we grasp the true gap between what is and ought to be, we will do anything to bridge that gap, or mend the break.

I think these days of people making visits on other sides of windows and so many ways to bridge the gap. We innately we long for more. Others seem determined to break with their neighbors. We can approach this time with force, or with love.

Jesus speaks of a bridge across that gap being built, link by link. "God the Father sent me, I have been here with you. I have been your Advocate, and now another Advocate will come to be with you forever. I, God, will not leave you alone. I am coming to you." In keeping Jesus' commandments to love, we will see Him, the embodiment of love, bridging the gap." As Julian of Norwich has said, "Love is our Lord's meaning." This love is what the Advocate will help us to encounter. We are linked by this love and linked in this love. The Advocate helps us to remain connected and live in this unbreakable love.

This is not an abstract love. Jesus shows us the reality of his living, relationships and actions with those he called by name, as he called to himself the cast aside, the "trying to just get by, for people like us. He didn't offer them domination or one-upping or asserting individual rights. Jesus offers love. Ever expanding love breaking through and lifting up, by one who will tell the Father, "not one of those you gave me have I lost." Without a break.

Jesus calls us into this love, to be held by it, to keep it in our hearts, and to be the links of God's love in our life and relationships and actions with others. Catherine of Siena imagined Jesus saying, "I ask you to love me with same love with which I love you... you cannot give me the kind of love I ask of you. This is why I have put you among your neighbors: so that you can do for them what you cannot do for me—that is, love them without any concern for thanks and without looking for any profit for yourself. And whatever you do for them I will consider done for me."

At times we may feel angry or frustrated, or exhausted by our lives or others. We may wonder what we could possibly do that would make a difference in the world. We may face what feels like thin ice, or feelings of being unknown to others. That's why we receive the Advocate- the Spirit who comes to dwell in us so none will be lost, so the love of Christ will be known in our midst, so we can proclaim God's unbreakable love with our lives.