



Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick
5th Sunday of Easter: May 19, 2019
Sermon Title: "Enfold the World in Love"
Gospel: John 13:31-35

A few years ago, I sat with fellow pastors preparing for our sermons in the season of Jesus saying “I am the bread of life,” which goes on for weeks. One somewhat exasperated pastor experiencing writer’s block exclaimed, “Ok, we get it! Jesus is the bread of life. How much more of that same thing can we say?!” Today, Jesus tells his disciples to love one another. We just heard this in during Holy Week. In fact, we hear it a lot. Like, four times in John, and in Romans, Ephesians, Galatians, 1st Peter, 1st Thessalonians, 1st John and 2nd John. Love one another. Serve one another, bear one another, greet one another with a kiss of love. We know.

In the abstract, we can almost just let those words flow right by—we are loved and should love. We get it. But before today’s gospel, John tells us that Jesus “having loved his own who were in the world, now loved them to the very end.” He has washed their feet, and shared a meal—hands on things. And then on to the cross. Not abstract love. Love one another as I have loved you.

Back in the 1400’s, Julian of Norwich, wrote of her vision of God in Christ, saying:

“The love that God most high has for our soul is so great it surpasses understanding. No created being can comprehend how much and how sweetly, and how tenderly our maker loves us...He is our clothing. In his love he wraps and holds us. He enfolds us for love and he will never let us go...Full lovingly does our God hold us (even) when it seems we are nearly forsaken and cast away because of our sin, and deservedly so...Our falling does not stop him from loving us...”

Sometimes art helps us to access what words cannot fully express. I invite you to look at this image:



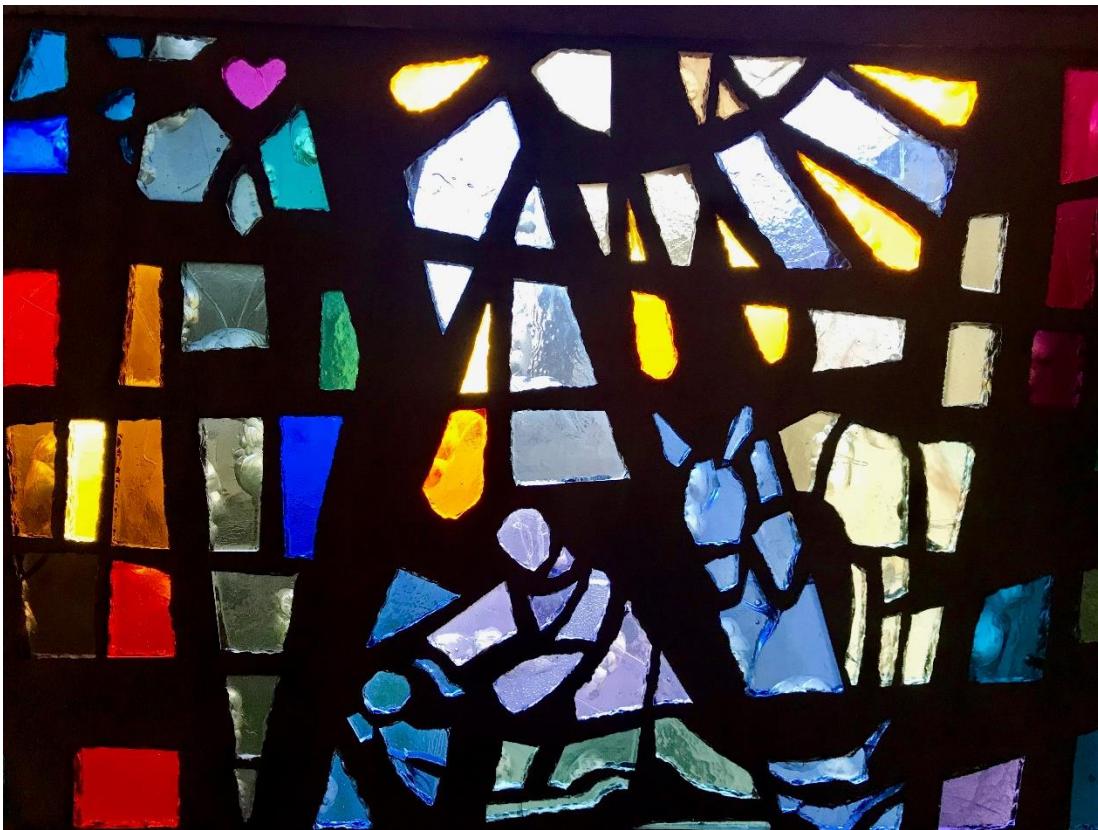
I chose this image, for its simple yet powerful expression of love and devotion- a mother and child. A young Jesus and his mother, Mary. They are cheek to cheek. Eye to eye. He is holding her and she is holding him. Their faces form a circle that is seemingly unbroken. It is intimate and tender.

There is a second inner circle, formed by Jesus' arms with one arm draped around his mother's neck and a hand upon her shoulder. Stretching, bending. They are not only embracing; they are enfolded in love. Can you imagine you are loved like this? Doesn't it transform the moment?

We are conditioned to “treat the spiritual life as another commodity, rather than a discipline of inner transformation...” Mirabai Starr, *God is Love (A Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam)*.

Yet this transformational love calls us to consider not only this love for ourselves, but also who does not experience this love, and who we most struggle picturing as embraced by God. Authentic engagement with God’s word demands that we “show up for the hard work of understanding...the sacred demand of faith calls us to love as we have never loved before.” Starr

This is depicted beautifully in one of our stained glass windows here at Grace.



I'm drawn to this window that has a heart near the center of it. Just below the heart are two figures. One lying down and one leaning over and lifting up the head of the one on the ground. It is the depiction of the Good Samaritan. The heads of the two figures are in alignment and the arms of the Samaritan form a bridge between them. Two people whose people do not share anything, in fact they see each other as adversaries, or at least with suspicions. Yet they are suddenly sharing in their common humanity. Although the style of the window is abstract, the emotion and the action are not. This window tells a love story. Even the donkey nearby is leaning in as they are enfolded in love.

There are many more ways to enfold one another in love. I'd like to share just a couple. You may have noticed today and whenever a passage refers to Jesus and "the Jews" I change it to "the religious leaders." For the simple reason that that phrase, "the Jews" has been used against others in painful and even deadly ways, instead of embracing our common humanity and God of love. Likewise, in our country where yet another mosque was burned in hate recently, does not our God of love call us to love our siblings with whom we share a common ancestor in Abraham?

Mirabai Starr, in her book, *God of Love, a Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* reminds us that “the wisdom teachings across Christianity, Judaism and Islam remind us that love- active, engaged, fearless love- is the only way to save ourselves and each other from what rages around us. There is a renewed urgency to this task now. We are asked not only to tolerate the other, but also to actively engage the love that transmutes the lead of ignorance and hatred into the gold of authentic connection...”

And I know, it's complicated. There are so many ways to express God's love, but they start with recognizing something in another as important and beautiful...and (desiring) that they know that at least one other person ...acknowledges the light in them” and enfolds them in love.

Friends, you are loved. Such beautiful words. Love as you are Loved. This takes willingness to stretch, bend, and transform for the sake of love. It's who we are called to be here at Grace. Today at our annual meeting we'll consider this love in the work to which God is calling us here at Grace. “The budget” is an abstract term we use to express how our time and talent and treasure are used, and even how this building is used. And how express our commitment to do these things with our ecumenical and inter-faith siblings. It is really our embodiment of enfolding the world in love.

Seeking out and embracing others with the depth of love we perhaps we see in the picture this day, or the window, or who God's word has spoken to our hearts. Jesus calls us to enfold the world in love.

It's so important he commands us to carry it in our hearts and minds in every context without exception. Jesus told his disciples that soon they would no longer see him in physical form, yet the risen Christ sent them forth and so sends us.

As Teresa of Avila once said, “Christ has no boy now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.” Yours are the hands, the feet, the eyes. You are his body. May Christ use as his body to enfold the world in love.

AMEN