

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

9th May 2021 – Sixth Sunday of Easter (Mothers' Day)

JOHN 15:9-19

LOVE, AS WE ARE LOVED

The saying goes, and in many cases it probably has a very good basis in the truth, 'never come between a mother and her offspring'. Have you ever seen that adage in action? We often see it in nature, don't we, at least among most birds and mammals, and perhaps some reptiles. In many mothers there is this inborn love and instinct to protect and help grow and develop their offspring at any cost. It makes me think of a plover which might fake a broken wing to draw a predator away, or a deer or kangaroo which might leave their offspring and deliberately draw the predator away in another direction, sometimes at the cost of their own life. Some creatures straight out attack the predator, as dangerous as that might be for them. Our neighbours when we lived in Alice Springs once ran out to a commotion in their chook yard to find one of their hens fiercely standing between her young chicks and a large king brown snake; sadly, that didn't end well for her. Nature provides us with many examples of mothers protecting, sacrificing, doing without themselves, so they can either protect or provide for their offspring. Many fathers in nature do this also, of course, but today is Mothers' Day so we are going to focus on them.

On many occasions, our human mothers show this same kind of self-sacrificing, self-denying, protect and provide for at all cost kind of love for us. Human mothers aren't perfect; some are pretty close, perhaps to us anyway, most try hard, and some for various reasons may not have been or are the kinds of mothers we are talking about here. But still, in their own way, they probably love their children, even if they either didn't know how to, or couldn't for some reason, show that love to them. What most mothers do show us, though, is that when it comes to 'love', it is a verb, not a noun; it is something which is done, not just which is talked about.

‘Love, as we are loved’. This could be something our mothers taught us, along the lines of ‘treat others like you would want them to treat you’. But this command, and reminder, is what we hear again and again in our Gospel reading from John 15: Love, as you are loved. This reading is part of a large section of teaching in John’s Gospel which happens at the time of the Last Supper; that meal Jesus and the disciples had together just before Jesus was betrayed and arrested, and then died on the cross the following day. And so, in this long teaching which actually takes up a large section of John’s Gospel, Jesus is preparing the disciples both for His death, and also for the time when He would return to heaven and no longer be with them at all.

For this part of Jesus’ teaching which we have before us today, what Jesus is wanting to teach His followers is what love is all about, using the example of the love which creates the unity between Himself and His Father. It is a love, Jesus says, which brings joy; ‘I have told you this to make you as completely happy as I am.’ (v.11) Jesus’ teaching about love contains a description, and a promise, of the love He is talking about. Again, like our mothers show us, love here is not just something which is talked about, it is something which is done. How did Jesus do it? He gave up His life for us. Happiness and joy come from living in the peace and grace of the One who would go so far to bring us back to His love.

Just like our mothers love us but then also teach us how to go out and live in the world, normally forming us to be people who are good and caring towards others, Jesus also, in love, leads and teaches us about the other side of what it means to live in His love: To love, as you are loved. Twice here He gives a very clear command, to ‘love each other’.

It’s interesting, isn’t it? It might bring back memories of what Jesus said in chapter 13 verse 34 ‘I give you a new commandment, love each other as I have loved you’, and that’s not surprising because what we have here is a part of that same conversation as Jesus is sitting around the table in that room with His closest friends. The command to ‘love each other’ keeps coming up, so obviously it’s an important part of what comes out of having a loving relationship with God.

‘Love each other’. There are plenty of times in the Bible when we are told to love others, commands which take in all people, even those we don’t know. We are even commanded to love our enemies. And while those kind of thoughts are no doubt still here, in this case the focus is strongly on loving ‘each other’.

It causes me to think; is it sometimes easier to love, in the way we talk about this as Christians, *philos*, love for everyone, is it easier to love people we don’t know, or don’t know very well, in this way than it is to love those we are close to or see regularly? The better we know people, or the more regularly we see them, does the love we are called to show get pushed aside by hurts, or disagreements, disappointments, or straight-out dislike? Do we find it easier to pray for, give donations for, even sympathise with or tell them ‘we are thinking of you’, those people we don’t really know or see regularly, than it is to love, forgive, accept, and support those we see more often? Knowing that our human nature can be like this, is that why Jesus restates this command to, ‘love each other’ throughout this time of teaching with His disciples?

Love, as we are loved. Love each other. We also can’t look past the fact that Jesus is giving this command to His disciples, who are representing the Church here. His command then to us all, His followers, His disciples, His people who know that we are loved by Him, His command to us is to ... ‘love each other’. This is about Christian churches getting on and working together, which is sometimes done well and sometimes not so well.

It’s also very much about how we relate to and treat each other as members of a Christian group who meet together for worship regularly. Do we always find it easy to show that love to each other? How do we go forgiving people we feel have hurt us, the same people with whom we regularly come up and share the meal of forgiveness which Jesus gives to us? How do we go accepting differences, be they about worship, or mission, or how things should be done, or how things look? When there are differences among us, and there will be, and even should be because that is how we grow and develop as people and as a group, are we always willing to sit down together and talk things through so that, even if we might not end up fully agreeing with

each other, we can at least see each other's point of view and find a way to move forward? Am I willing to take the first step in approaching someone to resolve a rift? If that step is taken towards me, am I willing to also move towards restoring a relationship? As a Christian family we do show this love, but there are always times when we can be more mindful of it and check if we are carrying out what Jesus is commanding us to do here.

Love each other. Love, as we are loved. Mothers' Day is about love, and we thank God for all the mothers who truly show us what love is all about. We are reminded here again, though, of just how great God's love for us is, that He would send Jesus to die for us to make us His friends, which here describes the closest and most intimate relationship we can have with Him. And then, as we are loved so much, we are sent out as His disciples to share this love. What a great thing it is to live in the love of God, and to experience the joy and peace this brings. And what a great privilege it is to now be called to share this love with others. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

As You Are Loved

Reflect on God's love for us. If you wish to, reflect on the ways that God's love for us is also illustrated by a mother's care for her child.

- What are the ways in which God has cared for you in the past?
- How do you still experience God's care in your life today?
- What does it mean for you that a part of being loved by God is that you receive His unconditional forgiveness?

Love

Remember that the way the word 'love' is used here is as a command; it is something we do because of how we are loved.

- Think about situations in which other people show this kind of Christian love to you.
- Think about situations in which you show this Christian love to others.
- Reflect on the people to whom you find it difficult to show this love to. Pray for them, and ask God to help you with this.
- Consider if there are any situations in which you could be more intentional about showing this love to people.
- Ask God to help you to always remember what it means to be loved by Him, and to relate to others in a way which shows His love to them.

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