



*As long as our faith is seen as comprising
a movement from me to God
we can only remain self-centred, earthbound.
But in apprehending it as a movement
from God to us we discover ourselves
caught up in that movement, in its own depths,
self-transcending and returning
to the Father through the Son.
The Christian name for this movement is Love.
—John Main, OSB*

SIXTH SUNDAY IN EASTER

17 May 2020

Invitation to Prayer — Psalm 66

Truly you have listened,
you have heard the deep sighs in my heart.
Blessed are you who have not turned away
nor removed your steadfast love from me.
Praise be to you, O God.

Gathering Prayer

Father, Son and Spirit,
Source, River and Flow:
By your love, we awaken to this new day
in which we remember and celebrate
the possibility of resurrection—
the rhythms of dying and rising
seeded into the earth.
Because you live, we live,
each breath bears witness to your gracious presence.

In this time of prayer,
as we still our bodies
and turn our attention fully to you,
quiet our minds and ready our hearts
to receive your love and peace.
Amen.

Scripture Reading — John 14:15–24

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me."

Going Deeper



As we dip once again into what is known as Jesus' farewell discourse in John (chapters 14–17), it can be helpful to remember its purpose. The farewell discourse is not so much a verbatim of Jesus' conversation with his disciples prior to his death. Rather, the evangelist has woven together teachings of Jesus and the community's reflections on them in an attempt to encourage the believers and address questions that were arising among them.

With this in mind, read again the short passage from the Gospel of John.

- What questions do you hear being addressed? (eg. If Jesus really is the Messiah, why do some believe and not others?) Which, if any, of these questions do you share at this time?
- How does the Gospel seem to speak into these questions? In other words, what insights are being posed?
- Like us, the beloved community was going through an unknown season of change. What encouragement do you hear on offer in this passage for you today?

Reflections in Solitude

You might choose to read the reflection followed by a time of silent meditation.

How to meditate—from the World Community for Christian Meditation

Sit with your back straight and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently begin to recite a single word — a prayer word or mantra. We recommend the ancient Christian prayer-word “Maranatha.” Say it as four equal syllables: Ma – ra – na – tha.

Breathe normally and give your full attention to the word as you say it, silently, gently, faithfully and — above all — simply. Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images, sensations and other words as they arise. Don’t fight your distractions: let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively, returning to it with intention when your attention wanders.

Prayers of Intercession — a guided prayer for community

“The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community”.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Triune God of Love,
we bring to mind the relationships of which we are a part:
communities who support us—mind, body, and soul,
groupings who give our lives joy and meaning,
our ties to particular places in nature
that bind us to land and shape our identity.
As each relationship comes into our hearts,
we offer you our gratefulness...



We bring to mind the disharmony and tensions that currently exist in our relationships:
we pray for frayed edges and strains,
connections that have been undone,
knots caused by misunderstandings and conflicts that seem impossible to untangle.
We hold each situation in the light of your love...

(continued on next page)

We confess our inability to love as you love us:
for our self-centredness and lack of empathy,
for our insistence that things go our way
and the tug-of-war we too easily begin and maintain,
for our lack of deep listening and full attention.
In your mercy, hear us as we pray
for your way of self-giving love to increase in us...



Finally, we pray for communities of people
whose freedom to be is restricted by
injustice, prejudice, poverty and hostilities.
We pray for those seeking refuge and asylum,
those who struggle to find food, clean water and shelter,
those who are displaced or existing in fear...
May your communion of love overflow and fill our world
with compassion, justice and peace. Amen.

Disciples' Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Blessing

May we step forward into this day
newly aware of the ocean of love in which we dwell
and may this love flow within and around us,
dissolving barriers and enabling us to love more truly the way of Christ.

The love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Spirit be with us all.

Reflections in Solitude — Week 8

Rev. Christine Gilbert for St. Andrews by the Sea Uniting Church

*"This is my commandment,
that you love one another as I have loved you."
(John 15:12)*

As we enter step one of the three-stage reopening of our country, we begin to experience small signs of recovery. Some are cuddling grandchildren for the first time in many weeks. We see individuals sitting at tables outside cafés again despite the cool autumn air. And in some instances, face-to-face gatherings bring a welcome relief from the internet platforms on which we've come to rely.

As we take this small step, we recognise it remains an unknown territory. Like businesses and organisations across our country, churches are wondering what the future will hold at the end of the pandemic. How will these months leave us?

There has been a lot of adaptation and experimentation in recent weeks. We have used imagination and flexibility to nurture our faith and care for one another. For us at St. Andrews, necessity has also invited us to embrace opportunities and relationships in new ways through the Emergency Relief Services. Crisis has truly been a fertile mixture of danger and opportunity.

While I welcome some of the new ways of doing things, it occurs to me that today's so-called innovations can easily become tomorrow's lifeless forms. In other words, newness can initiate a kind of energy that has the potential to hide the fact that we are, in reality, remaining *our same-old-selves*. It is much like when we buy a new outfit that brings pleasure and helps us feel good about ourselves for a time but does nothing to change the reality of the body it covers!



In contrast, what the Gospel seems to be after is a complete transformation. Experiences like the one we're currently moving through have the potential to lead us on the *inner journey* where we encounter God's love and are shaped by it. We are invited to enter courageously into the mysterious way of dying and rising walked by Jesus that is both the work and hope of the Christian life. It is a lifelong journey, a continually unmaking and remaking for the sake of love.



On first hearing, Jesus' command to love may seem incongruent. It might jar a bit. After all, the word "commandment" could suggest a prerequisite or legalism that doesn't rest easily with the uncoerced, free-flowing nature of God's unconditional love. How can love that is genuine be demanded of us?

But what if we place the emphasis on the second part of this verse, that is, that we are to love *as Jesus loves us*? This may not resolve everything, but it does point out the origin and kind of love we are invited to embody. It opens the door to the possibility that what we are called to is a particular quality of loving that is itself a grace which we must first experience if it is to flow from us.

In Jesus' farewell address, we hear that by the Spirit of Christ, God is *with us and in us*. We need not, then, generate the will to love nor simply try harder to be loving for the very Source of Love dwells within us. Our part is simply to receive what is already there, on offer, every day. Making the inner journey through reflective practices like prayer and meditation enables us to discover this Source and remain connected to it, allowing love to flow from us more readily and consistently.

Also, because this Source is in all and through all, the aim of Christian love may be different as well. In my experience, sometimes our ways of relating to and loving others are not reflective of this “in and through all” truth we profess.

For example, this week I was speaking with someone who came into church during the Emergency Relief time. In a previous conversation, he mentioned in passing his discomfort at times since it is not in his nature to receive something without working for it. I decided to take this thread up again with him, wishing to apologise if we unintentionally put him in a place of indignity. I explained, “You are going through a rough patch right now. When your situation changes, you can help someone in return.” To which he immediately responded, “Well, I am already able to help.”

Indeed! He, like all people and all creation, is full of the Spirit of God. Each of us can love and contribute, in our own way, out of this abundant wellspring.

His word to me was prophetic. For in our exchange, I heard again how our relating must attempt to convey this vision of the Trinity of Love dwelling in all. Such a perspective invites us to go beyond the view of a common humanity—which is valuable—to consider the very goal and nature of our interactions.

Might it be that Christ-like love seeks to dissolve, bit-by-bit, the barriers that exist between us—barriers that often maintain systems of division, disparity, injustice and harm? Might the overarching aim of love be to reveal and strengthen the Holy Tie that draws and holds all creation together?

I say, yes. And I wonder what my developing conviction will mean for me—and perhaps for us—as we continue to move with the Spirit into an unknown yet promising landscape.

The Moor

by R. S. Thomas

It was like a church to me.

I entered it on soft foot,

Breath held like a cap in the hand.

It was quiet.

What God was there made himself felt,

Not listened to, in clean colours

That brought a moistening of the eye,

In movement of the wind over grass.

There were no prayers said. But stillness

Of the heart's passions—that was praise

Enough; and the mind's cession

Of its kingdom. I walked on,

Simple and poor, while the air crumbled

And broke on me generously as bread.

