

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Year B

Acts 8:26-40
I John 3:14-24

Psalm 66:1-11
St. John 14:15-21

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

It seems to me from the reading in the Gospel and the New Testament today that there is a whole lot of loving going on. "Because we love the brethren ... by this we know love ... let us love not in word or speech but in deed and in truth ... those who love me will be loved by my Father and I will love them."

But then I look around in the world today, and I don't honestly see a lot of loving going on. Oh there is lots of love from time to time and from place to place. And I have and will always remain grateful for the love that is here at St. Peter's.

But I'm afraid that the world in general is not such a loving place. Children are raised in poverty in spite of the wealth of our nation. People go to bed hungry every night when we have an abundance of foods in warehouses. People hate one another because of the color of their skin or the place they were born. People hate each other because they come from the wrong tribe or people. People hate each other because what others

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possess. People hate each other over money, sex, love. You name it, we seem capable of hating over it. There is not a whole lot of loving going on.

And yet we have the message today. The message of love. Of course when you are poor or hungry or homeless love might not be a top priority. That is why the church has always responded to the need to look out for the physical needs of those less fortunate as well as the spiritual needs. That is why time and time again in the Holy Scriptures you hear the message about looking out for the widows and the orphans. We are told to love them, to care for them, and to meet their needs. There has been and always should be a whole lot of loving going on.

But I fear that the problem is even worse than this, if you can believe that possible. There is something just as bad in our midst or worse than failing to love those in the world who are in need. And that is our inability as Christians to love each other. In John 13:35 Jesus tells us that it is by our love for one another that people will know we are His followers. We are

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told by Jesus that we are supposed to love our neighbor as our self. And yet many, many times in the Christian community it seems we are not even capable of loving ourselves, let alone trying to love others outside our faith community. Instead we spend too much time worrying about the speck in our brothers and sisters eyes and about the rather large chunk of wood in our own. We are focused too much on tearing down and criticizing each other, to the delight of the devil and the world and to the shame of our Lord and to the shame of ourselves. There is not a whole lot of loving going on.

I honestly don't know why this is. Perhaps the beliefs of others threaten people. Perhaps people are just small minded. Perhaps people feel safer and better by judging others as less worthy. It is a mystery to me. But there is not a whole lot of loving going on.

It frustrates me to no end to see this contradiction in the message that the world sees in Christianity. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that. The world sees it and judges us.

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The world sees it and wonders. We see it and wonder.

The thing that keeps me going, the thing that lifts my heart when I'm frustrated is that I see a whole lot of loving going on at St. Peter's. Not that we all don't have room to improve or do it better. But there is a whole lot of loving going on. And our call is to continue that loving. Our call is to stand up to those who would say that we are wrong to love. We need to stand up to those who would claim that loving is not the first call of Christians. Stand up to those who would spew hate and discord. And to love them. That is right, love them.

I think love is the only weapon that will break down walls of hatred and discord and discontent. Love is the only weapon that will win in the end. Lengthy arguments about how to properly interpret the Holy Scriptures will not do it. Appeals to the traditions of the Church will not do it. Sometimes I don't even think that appeals to the example of Jesus in the Gospels will break down those walls so carefully built. But love can. And I know that it is not easy to love when you are not

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loved back. I know it is not easy to love in the face of
ridicule, condemnation, or hate. But that is what we are called
to do. We need to start and fan the flames of the love fire.
There needs to be a whole lot of loving going on in Seward.