

May 5th, 2024: Sixth Sunday after Easter

Texts:

Acts 10:44-48

10:44 While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. **10:45** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, **10:46** for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, **10:47** "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" **10:48** So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Psalm 98

98:1 O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory. **98:2** The LORD has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations. **98:3** He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. **98:4** Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. **98:5** Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. **98:6** With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD. **98:7** Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. **98:8** Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy **98:9** at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

1 John 5:1-6

5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we

love God and obey his commandments. 5:3 For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, 5:4 for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. 5:5 Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 5:6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

John 15:9-17

15:9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; **abide** in my love. 15:10 If you keep my commandments, you will **abide** in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and **abide** in his love. 15:11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 15:13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15:15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 15:16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

15:17 **I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.**

Abide in Love, Abide and Trust

Sermon:

A.) I have to be honest with you all. I struggled with preaching today, I cannot tell you how many times I thought about backing out. I imagine we all walk into church with burdens, expectations and anxieties. Maybe now more than ever.

However, the cross, the gospel, is where we go to lay down our burdens. One of my favorite songs currently, “The Gospel is Rest” By Elias Dummer and Land of Color says it best.

“Lord I've got the world upon my shoulders

But you've been saying "Child, put it down"

I prayed and prayed that you would take my burdens

But you keep saying "Child, put it down"

1.) I invite you to join me as we set our burdens down at the foot of the cross and allow The Gospel to work in its unique and restorative ways. The more I study the more I am convinced that The Gospel flows and molds on its own.

Last week Rev. Deb Sommerville talked about love. I've gone back and listened to her sermon in preparation for today. I believe it's important to yield to the other members of Christ's body, as well as admit this work of the church, whether it be preaching, community growth, love or any multitude of things the Church does; does not happen in isolation. The work of the Church

is done best when it's done in community. A community that seeks to pay attention to every last member. Growing up in church I heard that I am to love everyone a million different times but hearing it did not mean I knew what it meant. I would say I love all people and then proceed to block and ignore any and all opposition I faced. Anyone who disagreed with me was immediately someone I stopped listening to. I believed that I, at 14, 15, 16 years old had it all figured out. In my mind I had complete interpretative authority on who God is. As you can imagine that did not end up leading to fruitful connections and lifelong friendships. It isolated me and inevitably brought me harm.

2.) I want to turn our attention to the Acts reading for today, specifically verses 47 and 48. Here Peter asks "**Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?**" But God through Peter doesn't give anyone a chance to answer as verse 48 starts with an interruption from the Spirit "**So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.**" As if Peter's question is a rhetorical one, almost as if he meant "No one can withhold the waters for baptism to these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have!"

The reality is we don't get a say on who gets in and who doesn't. It is not our job to point fingers and declare where the Holy Spirit *isn't*. To do so is an attempt to define God, to put the Trinity into a box that our human minds can comprehend. Does it make God understandable? Maybe, it may even provide comfort for a while, but it also makes God small. And just like teenage Aly from years ago had to learn, no one has the ability to fully define God and thus contain God in a small and neat box. When we shove God into our boxes of assumptions we

accidentally attempt to make God inaccessible to all peoples. However, God's power and love does not sit in our boxes, it can and it will break out of the cages we place it in. The Holy Spirit will move regardless of human understanding, it will go further than the limitations we place on our love.

2a.) Our Psalms reading boldly declares the wonder and power of God. Thankfully we have a God who is miraculous beyond what we can understand. A God who sees all and knows all. God is the one in charge of salvation and I for one am very grateful that that task belongs to one who is more just, and fair than myself.

3.) When we turn to our John reading I'd like to take yet another page out of Rev. Deb's book and think for a minute about the word abide. Our John reading this week says the word *abide* 3 times in just the first two verses. What do we think of when we hear the word abide? For me I think of dwelling, remaining, staying. Words that to some extent implies that abiding is something stationary. I imagine most of us envision some sort of isolated pause. However, this command to abide in Jesus's love is neither of the two. This command of abiding in Jesus' love calls us, a community to act, to continue in the love shown to us by Jesus. This love is mobile, this love knows no boundaries. This love isn't boxed in by our human knowledge. Instead it moves beyond our words, beyond our expectations, our burdens and our anxieties. This love is done by the Body and it is fueled by God.

This love when enacted correctly connects us to something greater than us, it connects us to the community of believers, in this church, in the country, in this world. Regardless of our disagreements we are connected because we are God's beloved. Our 1 John reading today reminds us that ***“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God”***. We have been born of God. We are God's creation. We are beloved and we have been called friends by Jesus.

4.) True friends listen intentionally and respond in love. Friendship forms a deep and real attachment. It means something that Jesus calls us his friends, he wants to invest in us and hopes we will accept his invitation and invest in his mission. To be a friend of Jesus is to forgo human barriers.

We get a clear command of what it means to be a friend in our John reading, laying down one's life for another person. This command is obvious but there's more to it than being willing to die for another person; it is about more than life and death. It's about being willing to set aside your assumptions, anxieties and priorities to help someone else. For me when I think of friendship, I think about my friend Keagan dropping everything to call me for a couple hours even though she's several states and a time zone away. I think of my roommate, Taylor, asking me if I want blueberry ski when she knows I've had a hard day. In both cases neither of these people were under any obligation to love me well but they did. They had their own lives and responsibilities to take care of yet they set aside their needs for me. They set aside their priorities to care for me well.

5.) I invited us earlier to set our burdens down but I want to invite us to also set our boundaries down. Our boundaries when it comes to how we define God. Our boundaries on how we need to see Jesus in order to accept him. And our boundaries on what it means to love and who we are willing to love. We must be willing to forgo our boundaries and priorities to continue on in love in the way we are commanded to as friends of Jesus. Friendship with and because of Jesus is about more than being kind to the people we agree with. It involves a counter cultural idea of love. This kind of love goes beyond our cliques to draw people in as friends, as a member of the community. And community is essential to the Christian life. Friends that drop everything to care for others.

Abide, continue on in Jesus' love and know this work does not happen in isolation.

Our community is a gift for us. Our friends are a gift to us. We need the other branches to direct and sometimes redirect, to build up and to remind us of our belovedness. To remind us that even in our differences The Holy Spirit can and will still work. That in our fear God is still present and in our boundaries Jesus still calls us friend. And in it all the trinity is inviting us into something bigger than ourselves.