

“Sing a Love Song to the Lord”

This is my Commandment - that you love one another as I have loved you. The Israelites were always concerned with “Following the Rules!” In the book of Leviticus there are over 400 rules. Don't do any work on the Sabbath - but you can feed your livestock. You can prevent an injury but not heal an injury. And all those “Shall Nots” in the 10 Commandments. You shall not kill - commit adultery - lie - steal - covet. Who can *remember* all of these rules? Jesus said that if you follow *HIS* commandment - that you love one another as I have loved you . . . if we do that, all of the other rules will be followed. We all want to be loved, so we should love others.

In one of the PEANUTS cartoons, a little girl calls Charlie Brown on the telephone. "Marcie and I are about to leave for camp, Chuck," she says. "We're going to be swimming instructors." Marcie takes the phone and adds: "We just called to say goodbye, Charles. We are going to miss you. We love you." The perennial loser Charlie Brown stands by the phone with a grin on his face. One little friend asks, "Who was that?" He answers, "I think it was a right number." It feels good to be loved.

Jesus was speaking to the church: "This I command you, to love one another." Love was the mark of Christianity in the first two centuries. Tertullian watched the Christians and summed it up by saying, "Look how they love one another." Would the casual observer say the same thing about our church today? "Look how they love one another." Would it be possible for a hungry soul to come into our fellowship and to leave feeling nobody cares? How well do we measure up to this commandment from Christ - to love one another as I have loved you.

Here at St. Peter's the Gift of Hospitality is something we take seriously. We do all-inclusive bulletins so everyone can participate fully from their first time worshiping with us. We have a very inclusive Welcome Statement and are also a Reconciling in Christ congregation, showing that we want to welcome all people into the fellowship of God's people. Our Communion Table is open to all those who are Baptized into God's family - whether you are a member of this congregation or not. Even our Mission Statement - to share the life, love and joy of Jesus Christ with others - is all a part of following Christ's Commandment to: *love one another as I have loved you.*

Love even has *Healing* properties. Roy Angell once told the story of a particularly affectionate puppy who hung around a sanitarium. A doctor at the sanitarium decided to try an experiment on the pup. She made a small incision on the puppy's leg. Then she bandaged it. Finally, she instructed those at the sanitarium to feed the pup but not to show it any affection.

The change in the little dog was dramatic. Where it had always been energetic, frisky and friendly, it now seemed quite forlorn. Even more significantly, six weeks later the incision on its leg had not healed. The doctor then instructed everyone at the sanitarium to lavish love on the tiny creature. Soon the little puppy was frisky and energetic again. And the incision healed quickly.

No one knows the healing that lies within the human body, which may be activated by the power of love. In Sweden, a nurse was working in a government convalescent home. She was assigned to an elderly woman patient. This patient had not spoken a word in three years. The other nurses disliked her and tried to have nothing to do with her. The new nurse decided to try unlimited love. The elderly woman rocked all day in a rocking chair. So one day the nurse pulled up a rocking chair beside the lady and just rocked along with her and loved her. On the third day, the patient opened her eyes and said, "You're so kind." Two weeks later the lady was well enough to leave the home. It doesn't always work like that, of course, but studies are accumulating that show - Love heals! "*Love one another as I have loved you.*"

To some people, the church is not a place where they have felt loved. One of the reasons Young Adults do not come to church is because as a child they did not feel loved in church. Church is where they were told to - sit still - be quiet - don't do that - behave OR ELSE! Is it any surprise that once they become old enough they would want to *avoid* a place that was so unpleasant? *Love one another as I have loved you.* We need to start doing this with our children.

You see our Children's Choir sing once a month. At our rehearsals singing is only a small part of what we do. We do crafts, play games, have parties, get little surprise gifts every now and then and learn songs to sing in church. The top priority is not to learn songs. It's to get together and have fun, and most the time we happen to learn songs. "*Love one another as I have loved you.*"

Over the years we have noticed that some of our children tend to be "more challenging" than others. We have had kids run in the aisle, walk across pews, yell out during worship, drop hymnals during prayers, and push their parents buttons just at the right time. Now, out of love, we show patience and restraint and these children have grown up and provided special music for worship, serve as acolytes and crucifers. They participate in the Good Friday Crucifixion Drama, they have become adult members of the congregation, and they never say no when I ask them to do something. "*Love one another as I have loved you.*"

Today we have Baptized Avery Leigh /Felicia Lynne. She may be the perfect child as she grows up - or she may be a bit of a challenge. We're not really sure yet. How are we going to treat her? We will love her as Christ has loved us!

Just how has Christ loved us? As he continues to say in the Gospel of John: “No one has greater love than to lay down one’s life for a friend.” Jesus then says: “YOU are my friend.” Jesus loved us so much, that he laid his life down for us. We need to think of that the next time it’s inconvenient when our neighbor asks for our help or your spouse or kids ask for your attention when you are doing something else. *“Love one another as I have loved you.”*

Where would we be if Jesus put himself first? Jesus knows what is good for us. Today we are commemorating Church Music Sunday. I often think of God as the great Composer, and Creation is God’s Symphony. I came across some interesting facts. Things I never gave much thought to. For example: -the eggs of the potato bug hatch in 7 days; -those of the canary in 14 days; -those of the barnyard hen in 21 days; -The eggs of ducks and geese hatch in 28 days; - those of the mallard in 35 days; -The eggs of the parrot and the ostrich hatch in 42 days.. (Notice, they are all divisible by seven, the number of days in a week!)

God's wisdom is seen in the making of an elephant. The four legs of this great beast all bend forward in the same direction. No other quadruped is made this way. God planned that this animal would have a huge body, too large to live on two legs. For this reason God gave it four fulcrums so that it can rise from the ground easily. The horse rises from the ground on its two front legs first. A cow rises from the ground with its two hind legs first. What a remarkable work of creation! God's wisdom is revealed in His composition of sections and segments, as well as in the number of grains. -Each watermelon has an even number of stripes. -Each orange has an even number of segments. -Each ear of corn has an even number of rows. -Each stalk of wheat has an even number of grains.

Did you realize that the waves of the sea roll in on shore twenty-six times a minute in all kinds of weather. All grains are found in even numbers on the stalks, and the Lord specified thirty fold, sixty fold, and a hundredfold - all even numbers. God has caused the flowers to blossom at certain specified times during the day. This is so accurate that the great botanist Linnaeus once said that if he had a conservatory containing the right kind of soil, moisture and temperature, he would be able to tell the time of day or night by the flowers that were open and those that were closed!

Now if God, in His wonderful grace can arrange the life that is entrusted to His care in such a way that it will carry out His purposes and plans, why wouldn’t we trust that God can guide OUR lives? And if we do trust that, then loving one another as God has loved us, should be all of the guidance we need. Let’s do our part and let God do the rest. It’s really just that simple.

Rosemary Brown is a highly respected minister in Tennessee. She has been featured a number of times on The Protestant Hour National Radio Broadcast. She tells a story about a little girl in her church named Mickey. Mickey is four years old. She is a precious, adorable, out-going little girl who loves to sing.

One Sunday morning, Mickey ran down to the front of the Sanctuary just before the start of the morning worship service and with great excitement, she said: "Miss Rosemary Brown, can I sing a song this morning?" Not wanting to say "no", or to be a stumbling-block to this vivacious little girl, Rosemary said: "Of course you can." Then, Rosemary announced to the congregation that four-year-old Mickey would sing the call to worship to start the service.

Rosemary Brown picked up Mickey and stood Mickey on the front pew. She turned her around to face the now expectant and smiling group of people in church that day and Mickey sang: "Jesus wuvs me dis I know for da Bible tells me so. Yes, Jesus wuvs me." And then, Mickey threw her hands straight up in the air (like she had just scored a touchdown) and with a triumphant voice she said: "And, dat's dat!" And then Mickey sat down.

Mickey was right on target, wasn't she? What more do we need to know? Jesus loves us and that's that. What should we do to return that love? Simply follow Christ's command to "*Love one another as I have loved you.*" And dat's dat! Amen