

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga

6th Sunday of Easter (Mother's Day)

9th May, 2021

The Triune God meets with us

Jesus said: 'This is my commandment,

that you love one another as I have loved you.

No one has greater love than this,

to lay down one's life for one's friends.' (John 15:12,13 NRSV)

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

Amen

We sing the song 'Part of the Family' (ATE 284)

Come in, come in and sit down,

you are a part of the family.

We are lost and we are found,

and we are a part of the family.

1. **You know the reason why you came,
yet no reason can explain;
so share in the laughter and cry in the pain,
for we are a part of the fam'ly.
God is with us in this place,
like a mother's warm embrace.
We're all forgiven by God's grace,
for we are a part of the fam'ly.**

Come in, come in and sit down,

you are a part of the family.

We are lost and we are found,

and we are a part of the family.

2. **Children and elders, middlers and teens,
singles and doubles and in-betweenes,
strong eighty-fivers and street-wise sixteens,**

**for we are a part of the fam'ly.
Greeters and shoppers, long-time and new,
nobody here has a claim on a pew;
and whether we're many or whether we're few,
we are a part of the fam'ly.**

***Come in, come in and sit down,
you are a part of the family.
We are lost and we are found,
and we are a part of the family.***

- 3. There's life to be shared in the bread and the wine;
we are the branches, Christ is the vine.
This is God's temple, it's not yours or mine,
but we are a part of the fam'ly.
There's rest for the weary and health for us all;
there's a yoke that is easy, and a burden that's small.
So come in and worship and answer the call,
for we are a part of the fam'ly.**

***Come in, come in and sit down,
you are a part of the family.
We are lost and we are found,
and we are a part of the family.***

*Words and music: Jim Manley
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We confess our sins to God the Father...

Friends in Christ:

The Lord our God has told us to respect our father and mother. We should honour and love God, and so we should not look down on our parents and others in authority or make them angry. Instead, we should respect and love them, and help and obey them. We have failed to keep God's commandment. So let us confess our sins to God our Father and ask him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

**We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of heaven,
and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, by our**

own fault. Have mercy on us, for Jesus' sake, forgive us all our sins, and bring us to eternal life. Amen.

-Silent confession-

...and God forgives us

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our sins.

Amen.

Restore us again, O God our Saviour.

Do not be angry with us any longer.

Jesus leads us as we pray

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Let us pray that we love one another. *[silence]*

Jesus, our loving friend and Saviour, you have promised to give us your Spirit to be with us forever.

Stay within our hearts, so that we love one another as you have loved us. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

1st Reading – God speaks

Acts 10:44-48 *The Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit*

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.

⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." ⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

We respond with Psalm 98

¹ Sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvellous things;
**his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.**

² The Lord has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

³ He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
**all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.**

⁴ Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;

⁵ make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,

⁶ with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
shout for joy before the Lord, the King.

⁷ Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.

⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;

⁹ let them sing before the Lord,
for he comes to judge the earth.
**He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.**

2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles

1 John 5:1-6 *Faith gives us victory over the world*

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has

overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Gospel reading – God speaks through Jesus

John 15:9-17 *Jesus calls us his friends*

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ, raised to live forever.

Lord Jesus, thank you for loving us and making us your friends.

Help us to obey you and to love one another.

Amen.

God speaks to His children

We sing the hymn ‘One there is, above all others’ (LHS 165)

- 1. Jesus, more than any other,
well deserves the name of friend;
his is love, beyond all others,
costly, free, and knows no end.
They who once his kindness prove**

find it everlasting love.

- 2. Which of all our friends, to save us,
could or would have shed their blood?
But our Jesus died to have us
reconciled in him to God.
This was boundless love indeed;
Jesus is a friend in need.**

- 3. When he lived on earth, made lowly,
'Friend of sinners' was his name;
now raised up to highest glory,
he rejoices in the same;
now he still calls us his friends,
and to all our needs attends.**

- 4. O for grace our heart to soften!
Teach us, Lord, at length to love.
We, alas, forget too often
what a friend we have above;
but when home to you we're brought
we will love you as we ought.**

*John Newton 1725-1807, alt
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God speaks to us

The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.

The Text: John 15:9, 15

We could probably all think of a situation when we have really appreciated a true friend. A certain man named David tells the story how, after his wife of 44 years died, he didn't feel the urge to socialise with anyone. He just wanted to be left alone. But that didn't stop Tony, who was a friend of his, from inviting him to join a group of blokes who got together every Thursday for dinner. In David's words, "I told him I wasn't ready. He called again the next week, and again I said no. He kept calling every week, and finally I said, 'OK, I'll go. Anything to keep you from

calling me every week.”

We could spend a while listing the qualities of the people whom we consider to be good friends not just in name, but how they have helped and supported us in amazing ways.

Today we hear Jesus say, “You are my friends”. When you think about it, this is an amazing statement. Jesus is our Lord, our Master, our King, our God. The Scriptures make a point of telling us that he is highly exalted, glorious, all-powerful, creator of the universe and today he says to us, “I call you my friends”.

Jesus is talking about a dinky-di true-blue friendship. Not the kind when everyone pretends to get along; that everything will be fine when clearly everything is not fine, and we get along nicely so long as no one steps on anyone else’s toes or says or does something that is taken the wrong way.

What Jesus is talking about sounds very intimate, very close, very personal. Jesus explains what he means. “I love you just as the Father loves me”.

We know how close the bond of love is between God the Father and God the Son. We know how powerful Jesus’ love is because it led him to complete and total obedience to his Father’s will. Jesus’ love led him to places where we wouldn’t like to go.

He willingly allowed wicked people to treat him cruelly, mock him, humiliate him and nail him to a cross. He didn’t have to go through all this, but he did, because of his love for his Father and for us. John says, “We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us” (1 John 3:16). That’s the kind of love that Jesus has for us. Jesus himself says that no-one shows greater love than the person who gives up his own life for his friends (John 15:13).

The love of Jesus for each one of us is beyond doubt, whether we believe that or not. The love Jesus has for you is the same love that he has for his Father. It’s a powerful, personal, intimate, close, understanding, forgiving, compassionate, ready-to-do-anything kind of love.

It’s the supernatural kind of love that is prepared to even look past our failures, and forgive our sins, and embrace us just as the father welcomed home his boy in Jesus’ parable of the lost son. The son’s intention was to buy back his relationship with his father. This is revealed in the phrase, ‘treat me like one of your hired hands.’ (Lk 15:19b). But ‘while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed

him, and the son could only say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." This parable teaches that there are no-strings-attached to being lovingly welcomed back into relationship with God the Father.

When Jesus says, "You are my friends" and he is saying: "I know you intimately and personally. I know what frightens you and what makes you sad. I know what life's journey holds for you. But regardless of what the future holds, I will never forget you. I will never abandon you. My love for you, my forgiveness and offer of eternal life is my promise to you".

Jesus adds: "Remain in my love" or the older wording "Abide in my love". Jesus really means: "Live in my love"; "Be surrounded or immersed in my love"; "Let my love flow through everything in your life". This love that Jesus has for us is not a passing emotion; it's something that transforms our lives. He would have us live in his love so that it guides the way we love other people. In short Jesus says, "My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you."

This looks and sounds like a great idea until you actually have to love like this. Then it gets difficult. Think of some of the times that you have become involved in heated and tense moments that strained relationships with other people. There's no point in saying it's the other person's fault or somehow excusing our behaviour because we were too tired, too stressed, or the other person has pressed our buttons. Whatever the circumstances, we still end at the same point: we have not remained in Jesus' love. We have not lived his love in our own lives. We failed to abide in his love.

When Jesus talks about love, he is talking about an action, not just a feeling. For Jesus, it meant giving his own life for us—his friends—making the ultimate sacrifice. The Bible always talks about love in terms of being like Jesus. Just a few examples of loving like Jesus:

- serving one another;
- being tolerant of others;
- generously forgiving;
- looking out for the interests of others;
- considering the needs of others before our own;
- helping and sharing those who need support;

- praying for one another;
- showing respect for all people;
- accepting other people for who they are;
- not criticising, condemning, or complaining.

Love is always described as an action. It might mean rolling up our sleeves and doing something that is really difficult; something that really goes against the grain; doing something another person's way and not always getting our own way. It might mean encouraging that person who has done a good job even though we might not like that person very much. It might mean forgiving and making peace even though we feel as though we are the one who has been wronged.

Jesus' words: "Remain in my love" indicate there are no exceptions to what he says: "Love one another as I have loved you". There is no room for an eye for an eye; no argument whatsoever for turning your back on someone in need; no room for intolerance, impatience and rudeness; no reason for walking away and not seeking friendship.

At an Easter dawn service when the church was still in darkness, the Easter candle was brought by one of the children into the church down the centre aisle. Every worshipper had been given their own candle and those closest to the aisle lit their candle from the Easter candle and passed the flame on to the next person until the whole church was filled with light. This is what Jesus means to remain in his love. Christ is love, then every act of love that is passed from one person to the next is passing on the love of Jesus into the lives of others. When the friends of Jesus abide in the love of Jesus, imagine the profound effect this can have on congregation and community alike.

If every person here in this church—if every committee and council, if every person who leads the music, serves morning tea, cleans this building, chairs a meeting, teaches our children, parents a child—is bent on abiding, being immersed in the love of Christ, what a difference we would see.

May we renew our commitment to following Jesus and all that these words of Jesus mean: "I call you my friends ... Remain in my love".

This is a tough call, but it's simply a call to discipleship. Let's always remember who it is that is speaking these words. It's the One who says, "You are my friends." As our friend, Jesus Christ loves us so intensely that when we mess up,

and we will, he is willing, still, to dust us off and give us a fresh start to “live in his love”.

That’s the other aspect of remaining in Jesus’ love. Trusting him. He will always be our friend—a genuine friend who will stick by us through thick and thin. It’s a privilege to be called a friend of Jesus. It’s a joy to be abide in Jesus’ love, to be surrounded by his love, and then to love others as he has loved us. Amen.

We confess our faith in the Triune God

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.**

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven,

**and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,
from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic* church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting.

Amen.

** 'catholic' here meaning 'universal'*

We sing the song 'Love one another' (ATA 177)

- 1. When I go, you will look for Me,
When I go, you will wonder.
When I go, you will look for Me;
But I won't be gone, you will see Me when you:**

Love one another, love one another,

Care for each other;

Love one another, as I have loved you all.

2. **If you love you are friends of Mine;
If you love you're My children.
If you love you are friends of Mine;
Everyone will know I am with you when you:**

*Love one another, love one another,
Care for each other;
Love one another, as I have loved you all.*

3. **Love your friends, love your enemies,
Anytime, anybody,
Love your friends, love your enemies;
In this mystery you are loving Me, so:**

*Love one another, love one another,
Care for each other;
Love one another, as I have loved you all.*

*Robin Mann
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We give of ourselves

Thank you, heavenly Father, for showing us your love in your Son Jesus, and for making us his friends.

**Help us to love you and obey your commands, and to love one another.
Teach us to accept and serve others as you have accepted and served us.
Amen.**

We pray for others

Our Lord promises that the Father will give us whatever we ask for in his name. In the power of his Spirit then, let us pray with confidence, responding to the words, "Lord, in your unfailing love", with "direct us and hear our prayer."

Heavenly Father, thank you for your unfailing love, and for Jesus' perfect obedience to your commandments in our place. Motivate us by the gospel and direct us by the law to love as Jesus commanded.

Lord, in your unfailing love... **direct us and hear our prayer.**

Thank you for directing Peter to embrace the Gentile household of Cornelius with

your saving gifts. Direct us to see that the gospel is for all people, no matter their race, colour or beliefs. And dissolve the boundaries we place in the way of love for others.

Lord, in your unfailing love... **direct us and hear our prayer.**

Thank you for the gift of marriage also for the gift of parents and children. Motivate all parents to take care of their children and direct them to do this with wisdom and skill. Especially move and direct them by the saving love of Christ to bring their children his saving love as well.

Lord, in your unfailing love... **direct us and hear our prayer.**

God our Father, we pray:

for new mothers, coming to terms with both the joys and demands of motherhood;

for pregnant mothers, expectant and wondering, or fearful;

for those mothers who are tired, stressed, ill or depressed;

for those who struggle to balance the demands of work and children;

for those who have to struggle with difficult decisions about whether or not to become a mother or to have another child;

for those who are unable to feed their children due to poverty;

for those whose children have physical, mental or emotional disabilities;

for those who have children they do not want;

for those who raise children on their own;

for those who have lost a child through death or abortion;

for those who care for the children of others;

for those whose children have left home;

for those whose children have rejected their love;

and for those whose desire to be a mother has not been fulfilled.

Bless all mothers, that their love may be deep and tender,

and that they may lead their children to know and do what is good, living not for themselves, but for God and for others.

Lord, in your unfailing love... **direct us and hear our prayer.**

Thank you for those who lead us in singing your new song. Direct our worship in right paths, and motivate us to gather in holy assembly with joy and family affection. Guide Australian Lutheran College, its council, staff and students so that law and gospel is properly taught in our church.

Lord, in your unfailing love... **direct us and hear our prayer.**

Thank you for the affection we enjoy from others. Warm again those whose love has grown cold. And direct loving companions to those who live without love and without joy.

Lord, in your unfailing love... **direct us and hear our prayer.**

Thank you for sending rain and sunshine as the earth needs it. Protect the world from disasters of every kind. And provide for all in need, including those we know personally to be in want and whom we now name silently in our hearts...
(brief silence)

Lord, in your unfailing love... **direct us and hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, through the Spirit of your Son, keep us in your word and forgiving love so we serve you in faithful obedience. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

We pray the prayer of Jesus

**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.**

**Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.** Matt 6:9-13

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.

Amen.

The Triune God sends us out with blessing

May the God of peace, who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus, provide you with every good thing you need in order to do his will;

Go in peace. You have been chosen by God.

Thanks be to God. Amen

We sing the song 'God gave mothers to protect us' (tune: LHS 164)

**1. God gave mothers to protect us,
and to guide us in love's way.
They were with us from our cradle,
teaching us to watch and pray.
Precious Saviour, bless our mothers;
or our mothers' memory.
Precious Saviour, help us honour
those who gave us love so free.**

**2. As we grew they stayed beside us,
listening, loving constantly.
They spoke to us words of wisdom,
though, at times, so hard to see.
Precious Saviour, bless our mothers;
or our mothers' memory.
Precious Saviour, help us honour
those who taught us how to be.**

(This verse sung by mothers who are present)

**3. Now as mothers, Lord, we ask you
be our helper and our guide.
Give us courage, bless our efforts,
let us live love deep and wide.
Precious Saviour, keep us faithful,
teaching, leading, loving, true.
Precious Saviour, thanks for children;
they are precious to you too.**

*Delores Jenson (alt. by David Schütz)
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Announcements