

**Sunday, May 19, 2019 – Fifth Sunday of Easter/New Members/Staff
Recognition/Baccalaureate
“Disciples Love”**

John 13: 31-35

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Definition

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

This is a special day in the life of our congregation. We celebrate the Lord's Supper, the very event John was writing about in the section just before our Gospel lesson today. We welcome our new members – some being confirmed after participating in the On-Ramp group, others transferring from other Lutheran churches – to do life together here committed to love for each other as God's people and on God's mission to love the world. We also recognize and celebrate the work God does through our staff, as we also celebrate significant life milestones for those graduating this spring. I'll be honest, sometimes when I look ahead at the calendar on such a packed Sunday such as this I feel a little overwhelmed but then I thank God – look for all these reasons to be thankful! Look at what God is doing here among us! Look at the opportunity that we have to love one another.

Love is a central, distinguishing remark of Jesus' disciples, so much so that it is how all people are supposed to know who we are. “Oh, hey, those people are doing an awesome job at love, they must be Christians!” What do you think?

You might be pessimistic about it and say that it sounds pie in the sky. Or, you might say it looks hypocritical. Our denomination is in a “convention year” which means plenty of politicking and more mudslinging than I care to admit. Or your mind might wander to that person who said something mean or that really oughta hear this one, because pastor should put them in their place to know what love and Christian behavior is... or maybe, you're thinking pastor oughta practice what he preaches. And even if your feelings are more measured, you still might, at best, deem Jesus' words to be, at best... aspirational. A nice goal, but c'mon, let's be real.

Call me crazy, but I don't think Jesus is speaking aspirationally here. Try really hard at this and if you get it close to right, I'll give you an "A" for effort. No – He means it! A new command is what He gives – that we love each other, as He first loved us, and it's how others will know who we are.

It's appropriate that this text came up for this new member Sunday because one of our new members who we officially took in a couple weeks ago is Pastor Augie Ristow, who wrote a scholarly study on the Greek word for love used in this very text – agape. It's a never-ending, faithful, selfless love with no self-interest at hand but concerned purely for the well-being of the other. It's sacrificial and quite frankly, it's beyond the bounds of human ability because the agape God first put into Adam and Eve was corrupted by the fall into sin. Sure, we can love but only in the pale imitation, aspirational kind of way that realistic types like you and me think when we hear the command to love one another and think, "Oh, that's nice, but let's get real."

No, Jesus really means it, folks. Loving and being a disciple are intertwined, so much that you don't get one without the other. So how can you love then? Do you beat yourself up, wondering why you can't get it together, why you can't love the way Jesus commands and Jesus shows? To be, frankly, very Lutheran about it, how do we not get confused between Law and Gospel as we talk about this?

Pastor Augie has a great "aha" moment in his book when he read Romans 5:5 – "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." The pure agape love, with all of its divine purity and potency is *poured into our hearts*. And the word for pouring into is interesting here, too because it means to pour fast and recklessly, like your heart is the container and you're dumping in the liquid too much and too fast and it comes splashing over the side, overflowing and making a mess. When God pours His love into your heart you can't help but live it out and share it with other people – which is exactly what disciples do.

Like I said, I love Sundays such as this because we can't help but show love to one another. These kind of days just come about. And there's already plenty of love happening

because we're disciples of Jesus here. Bringing in a new pastor is geared at helping us to be intentional here, too. God is going to keep pouring out His love splashing over no matter what we do. That's what we get for being Christians. His Word, the Sacraments and their ongoing affect, the forgiveness you hear every week, that's going to come, as is true of everything God is in charge of, as Luther says, even without our prayer. So we pray and we seek growing intentionally to live our love for each other as disciples of Jesus.

That's a major focus of what Pastor Brad is going to be about. It's not, as I've heard a lot of people say, an answer to spell lots of relief for me. Honestly, a lot of Pastor Brad's time is going to be doing things that either aren't currently happening or aren't receiving enough attention right now. The biggest of those is setting up a ministry model for Mountain View to help us grow together as disciples and we know from Jesus that disciples love one another and thereby are witnesses of God's love to the world. Allow me to share some thoughts on what a disciple is from our On-Ramp discussion book:

All Christians are disciples. Disciple is not a term that we graduate from. Jesus is always the master. A life of a disciple is learning from and following Jesus through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is a lifelong journey. Not everyone is good at being a disciple. Following Jesus happens in the real world setting where God has placed us and does not always mean leaving where we are or what we are doing. Discipleship is not one size fits all. Just as God did not create us all the same, every disciple will be unique. Discipleship is not a way to earn salvation or favor from God and at its heart, discipleship is abiding in the Word.

Our hope and our prayer is that, abiding in God's Word, following Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit we'll grow in our lives as disciples, joining each other on this journey while using the pure kind of love that is only possible by God pouring it into us, overflowing from our hearts to love other people with the kind of love Jesus has for us. In so doing, that love will also be shared with our community and our world that through our words and our witness, people will meet Jesus through us! In Jesus' name, Amen.