

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

May 19, 2019
Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C

The readings this week:

◦ Acts 11:1-18 ◦ Psalm 148
◦ Revelation 21:1-6 ◦ John 13:31-35



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

If We Have Love for One Another

This last Sunday night we spent some time thinking about forgiveness with our confirmation youth. Specifically, we were focusing in on the petition of the Lord's Prayer where we pray, *"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."*

To bring the learning home, one of the exercises we shared in was that of remaking a video. We viewed this short clip of "Signs of Forgiveness," we handed out cardboard and markers, and we asked them to make their own signs. Then in their small groups they filmed themselves with their signs, emulating what they had seen in the video. Only, of course, what they wrote on their signs was personal for each of them.

It went pretty well. The conversations were meaningful and thoughtful. Yes, some of them took it more seriously than others. To be sure, as you can imagine, some took it so seriously they found they could not fully participate, for their pain was too fresh.

I have to say I was knocked over when I walked in to observe our 7th graders. One had scrawled on his sign,

"You told me I ought to kill myself."

And then he flipped it over,

"But I forgive you."

And oh, isn't it so that we need to love each other now more than ever?..

For well do I remember Junior High...Now, maybe it is just simply harder for kids, for they cannot control who they spend their time with as much as adults sometimes can. And maybe not. Perhaps the suffering we too often inflict on each other is just more subtle than it was when we were in middle school. And maybe not.

I responded on Sunday night by talking to our kids about bullying. I spoke of my own experience at the hands of a couple of my classmates. Yes, I spoke about taking the long view --- for these decades later it is clear that I more than survived. While it felt like it would never end then, 7th grade did not last forever. More than that, I talked about how they might take care of and look out for and stand with each other out there in the world. And about how one of the

ways we do that if we can see no other way is to tell someone who can help. We brainstormed for a moment about who we should tell should it happen to us. Mostly, I simply wondered with them about how we might be called to love each other. Even if we are not especially friends outside of church.

Will they? I have no idea. Indeed, do any of us ever really do this well? I have to say, I don't always know. And yet, I do know it is what Jesus calls us to now. To Love Each Other.

And I know this, too. This calls for more than an impromptu response to a group of 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. We need to talk about what it looks like to love each other over and over again. More than that, these are words which need to be backed up by concrete action: demonstrating the kind of patient, enduring love which Jesus calls us to. And which Jesus offered first.

It takes energy, attention, resources and more. And yet it is more than worth it. For from what I hear in today's Gospel, this is all that matters: It is everything. It is what will enable us to keep on and it will be our most enduring witness to the world.

For 6th, 7th, and 8th graders, yes. And for all the rest of us, too. For you know this as well or better than I: too often, congregations, followers of Jesus today, are known for how we do NOT love each other --- for how we inflict pain on one another. And so I wonder now:

What would it look like for God's people to change that? How might we love one another on Sunday mornings and Tuesday afternoons and Thursday mornings? In the workplace, in our neighborhoods, at school, at the ball field? How can we begin to love each other even better than we have before? Even if we are not especially friends with each other. Even then. Especially then.

I have said this more times than I can count. This world we live in has far too few examples of what love looks like: especially across our differences. Indeed, it matters more than ever that we are given the chance to let the world know who we are in this way: As We Have Love For One Another. This more than anything else will bear witness to who we are. Because of who Jesus was and who Jesus is for us still.

~ Janet Hunt, [Dancing with the Word](#)



___ **1st Reading:** [Acts 11:1-18](#)

In spite of his good qualities, what shows that Cornelius was not saved until Peter came? When Peter got back to Jerusalem, what problem did he face? Do you believe it was right for Jerusalem Christians to criticize Peter? How did Peter respond? What phrases show that the Gentiles received the same experience as those on the day of Pentecost? Was the message Peter gave to the Gentiles different than his message to Jews? What conclusion did the Apostles and other believers reach? Peter said, "How can I stand in the way of God?" as part of his defense. How might you apply that to your own life? [Eagle Christian Church](#)

___ **Psalm Reading:** [Psalm 148](#)

How does this psalm constitute a crescendo of praise? What sort of method is used to bring us all to praise? How are the three sections ordered in this psalm? Who are we addressing in each section? What is the highest creation of God? How does this psalm present age-integrated, cross-generational worship? What does God do for His people in the last verse? How do we express exaltation? What are the truths that encourage a spirit of exaltation in our praise? What other created things would you call to the worship of God? Can you think of some amazing elements of the creation of God that you have learned about recently? [Generations](#)



As I have loved you. How DID Jesus love us? By befriending and eating with outcasts and sinners, collaborators and prostitutes, the unclean, the impure, the unloved. By stretching the boundaries of his own love. By self-sacrificial life and death. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have this kind of love for one another.

Love's challenge - the call to ever widening, ever expansive circles of love: love in all forms, to live and die for love, and embodying the qualities of gentleness and generosity. As we mature in love, our love and our actions have no boundaries.

Beloved, love and let yourself be loved.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

___ **3rd Reading:** [Revelation 21:1-6](#)

What might be the purpose of God keeping the church and Israel distinct in their identity for all eternity? Heaven will be a place of perfect relationship with one another, a place free from sin and most importantly a place of perfect communion with God. How is your relationship with God recently? In light of eternity, what might you do this next week to deepen your relationship with your Savior Jesus Christ? [James River Church](#)

___ **4th Reading:** [John 13:31-35](#)

Why do you think Jesus would allow Judas to receive this foot washing, even knowing what was about to happen? Jesus wrapped the towel around himself and did the job of a servant. What do you think he was showing his disciples by doing so? At the same time, what was he showing the disciples about how he valued them? Jesus asks, "do you understand what I have done for you?" in verse 12. What do you think they were thinking about this at the time? In what ways might they look back on this night after the events of Good Friday and Easter? Peter wants to express this kind of love by following Jesus, but instead Jesus predicts Peter's denial that night. Why do you think Jesus would tell Peter about this in advance? Rather than saying, "love me as I have loved you," Jesus tells them to "love each other as I have loved you." Why is this command so extraordinary? What are some small but practical steps that we can take to change other people's story by showing love like Jesus did with washing feet?

[Faith Element](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

Draw me today into fresh encounters with Jesus, O God.
Make me a servant of love
so that others may know how much You love them
and I may know how much You love me.
Let me not be afraid of new pastures,
whether they be green or brown or parched.
And as I pass through whatever the day's valleys,
keep my head lifted up to the mountain,
from whence my help comes.
Never let me forget the people Jesus welcomed...
the greedy and the great,
the bad and the good,
the respected and the cheats.
Even as the world becomes more callous and chaotic,
may I never underestimate Your capacity
to fashion the miraculous from the monstrous,
even to make me a choice masterpiece
from the mire and the clay.

~ Leonard Sweet, [Preach the Story](#)