

**The Sixth Sunday of Easter**  
**5/1/2018 Year B**  
**John 15:9-17**

**“There’s a lot of talk about love in this morning’s readings; it is mentioned more than 17 times in the opening prayers and in the readings today”**

Frederick Buechner has observed: "In the Christian sense, love is not primarily an emotion, but an act of will." [Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* (San Francisco: Harper, 1973), p. 63.] Thus, loving another is something you do rather than something you feel.

The preacher and author Will Willimon told of an event that happened to him:

On his way out of the church late one afternoon, he was chagrined to see, coming towards the church down the walkway, a rather forlorn looking man with a small bag, obviously a wanderer, a vagabond, a drifter, AND obviously coming toward the church seeking a handout.

Willimon remarked to himself this is what you get for having a church situated near a busy highway. These drifters drift through about twice a week, seeking a tank of gas for their trip, a meal, some gift -- preferably in cash -- for their journey to who knows where. As he remembered they always have some sad story of woe to tell but the end is always the same -- can you spare about \$25.00 in cash. (for me it usually, "Pastor Randy, can you help me with my rent, my electric bill or my water bill or pay for my medicine ...)

Willimon sighed as he watched the man approach. It had been a long day – and he was anxious to get home for a few minutes; for he had a meeting to return for that night and he was anxious to get home. So Willimon thought he would meet the man at the door, head him off, give him the only cash he had -- a mere \$15.00 -- and then send him on his way.

"What can I do for you?" Willimon asked with not a small amount of annoyance.

The man asked for help just as Willimon imagined that he would. "Yes, yes," he said. "Well, I'm in a bit of a rush. So here is all I have. A five and a ten. That's all I've got."

The man took the money -- looked at it. And without a word, he turned, and headed out toward the street. Then he stopped, and turned toward the minister as he locked the church door.

"I guess you think I'm supposed to thank you, to be grateful," he said with a surprising tone of defiance.

"Well, now that you mention it, a little gratitude wouldn't hurt."

"Well, I'm not going to thank you. You want to know why?" he sneered.

"Why?" Willimon asked.

"Because you are a Christian -- You don't help me because you want to. You have to help me because HE [now thrusting his finger up into the air] told you to help me!" And then he left.

Willimon stood there stunned. The nerve of some people!

On his drive home it finally hit him -- He was right -- we are commanded to love. Amen. [William Willimon, *Commanded to Love*]

The very nerve of some people ... we have to because HE [thrust finger into the air] told us to love others.

Do you ever wonder why we don't -- we are commanded to love others -- and not just the easy ones --but even those we don't like -- those we don't wish to love -- those who are not grateful enough -- those who are not our friends .... Do you ever wonder why we don't love the others?????

"I no longer call you servants, I call you friends!" Jesus tells those who will listen to him in John's gospel this morning!

And if we are Jesus friends ... then we are to act like His friends ... and His friends love others to the point of self-sacrifice.

A Priest and writer named Andrew Greeley told this story on clergy that relates to this passage from John's gospel: ([www.agreeley.com](http://www.agreeley.com))

Once upon a time there was a certain bishop who was very proud of being a bishop. He was also very careful to see that everyone treated him with great respect, because, after all, he was one of the successors of the apostles, wasn't he?

This bishop didn't seem to remember what a stubborn, pig-headed, and difficult crowd the apostles were.

This bishop was always upset whenever the acolytes at the masses around the diocese were not trained to perfection -- to meet what he saw as the best way to serve at the altar.

Some people thought the bishop was a real jerk. Others thought he was a nice enough guy -- for a bishop -- but that he had a few obsessions that he would well get along without.

So, one day, the sixth Sunday of Easter to be exact (like today), he was saying mass at a parish where a certain mother had warned her little girl who was serving as the acolyte that morning not to offend the bishop. Whatever she might do, be very careful not to anger or upset this bishop.

Well, the little girl was a feisty one and she wasn't afraid of this bishop or of anyone else (few sixth-grade girls really are you know).

So, when she was slow in bringing the towel for the washing of his hands and he snapped his fingers impatiently, this girl acolyte stopped in her tracks. "Bring me the towel," the bishop ordered.

The feisty little girl remembered the Gospel I just read to you and shouted right back. “Don’t give me orders, I’m not a servant, I’m a friend.”

After a very, very quiet moment, everyone laughed. Then so did the bishop. He hugged her and said of course she was a friend because she had the courage to tell him when he was making a fool out of himself.

Then everyone applauded and the bishop had learned a valuable lesson about what it means to be a friend of Jesus.

**To be a friend (of Jesus as well as anyone else)** we must learn to give of ourselves and share of our lives with one another without fear of rejection and without shame. There is no single person in this room who has not made lousy decisions from time to time and messed our lives up.

***BUT “I no longer call you servants, I call you friends!” says Jesus and says me!***

**To be a friend (of Jesus as well as anyone else)** we must learn to care about one another – caring as much for what happens to another person as we care for what happens to ourselves.

I call you my friends also.

I hope and trust that you will carry on the good work begun here at Good Shepherd ... that you will love one another just as Christ has loved you ... and that you will continue to care for the poor, feed, the hungry, work for justice, and always respond to the needs of even those you don’t particularly like ...

For He told you to!

*Randy Dunnavant*