

May 17, 2020 6th Sunday of Easter Sermon by Rev. Annie Ladnier
Texts: Acts 17:22-31, John 14:15-21

Opening Prayer: Holy and Abiding God, only in you, by your very grace, do we live and move and have our being. You are our hope. As we delve into your word now, tune our hearts to yours. May your desires become our own. May your compassion become our own. May your love, become our own. Amen.

Who are my puzzle people out there? I know many of you have been completing jigsaw puzzles lately, but what about other puzzles- word puzzles or number puzzles? I keep seeing these weird numerical puzzles with cartoon animals going around my social media feeds. My mother has always been into puzzles, especially word puzzles- crosswords and word scrambles. I've always wanted to like puzzles- to be good at them, but I can't say that I am.

One particular puzzle that never fails to frustrate me is one of those tile puzzles- the ones where you are supposed to unscramble an image by sliding tiles over and back and up and down. I remember getting these in happy meals as a child, like it was some sort of prize. I'd spend what seemed like HOURS **rearranging** those darn tiles and never could get hamburglar or the fry kid, or whatever it was, to look quite right. To this day, puzzles are not my go-to activity for passing the time, especially not in quarantine.

Come to think of it, maybe that's been at the heart of some of the anxiety this all has caused for me- - that in just a few short weeks, **this virus created one massive puzzle for all of us**, only instead of a simple 3X3 grid of tiles to rearrange, it has countless moving parts and we aren't even quite sure what the final image is even supposed to look like.

We have been forced to rearrange our entire lives- sliding the work tile one direction, the daycare tile another, the cooking and cleaning tiles endlessly forward and back, the homeschooling tile down as low as you can shove it, the sleep and exercise tiles seem stuck, and the mental health tile keeps getting shoved in the corner so that the safety and sanitation tiles can freely move.

And if you're like me, and you weren't really a big fan of puzzles to begin with, then I bet you likely weren't a huge fan of powers outside of your own control telling you, you HAD to keep doing this same puzzle for weeks on end.

At least that's a bit of what I've picked up- most of us not liking being told to stay home, or not open our business, or not visit our grandchildren, or take our vacations. **We are a people who collectively do not enjoy being told what to do, especially when it forces us to rearrange, just about, everything...**

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

Just 6 weeks ago we heard these words in the midst of a quarantined Holy Week. We were only a couple of weeks into this new normal with no idea what was ahead of us, still feeling all the warm fuzzies of everyone's sudden neighborliness. It was easy to give name to new ways we were seeing God's love at work in and through our communities. We were all in this together.

But now these number of weeks later, I can't help but notice that the novelty of such neighborliness seems to be wearing off and that diligence we had in tending to our neighbors seems to be waning. I've heard and read words between people that are far from charitable. It seems we are ceaselessly bent toward the divide and conquer mindset, which is a far, far cry from the humble foot washing of Maundy Thursday.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Just 6 weeks ago we as Christians gathered together to actually CELEBRATE a savior who comes to us commanding such things as LOVING ONE ANOTHER. Jesus sat at that last supper table and he didn't make a nice *suggestion*. He gave us a new *commandment*- just one- to love. A simple word. An emotion and feeling we are versed in from the moment we enter this world and feel our mother's caress. Not one of us is a stranger to knowing what it feels like to be loved- either because we have loved deeply- or because we have been so hurt by those who should have loved us that we have spent a lifetime aching for that kind of love.

The world is indeed, aching for this kind of love right

this

moment.

Here in the middle of a global health crisis, with no discernable treatment or vaccine, with new symptoms emerging daily, with politicians and legislators who absolutely refuse to come together for the sake of the common good, with people legitimately terrified that their life's work will all be for naught, with at-risk populations too frightened to get their own groceries, and parents of immunocompromised children crying in the middle of the night, with people so afraid they're willing to storm government buildings with assault rifles, and with the haunting images of children in face masks...

With all of this, my dear, sweet, siblings in Christ, can **we** look a bit deeper? Can **we** listen a little closer? Can **we** empathize on another level? Can **we** love, can **we truly love one another?**

By THIS everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another...

If you love ME, you will keep my commandments.

This LOVE commandment is the one that Jesus is talking about here. If we truly love Jesus, as our lips confess, as our eagerness to gather together again in church as soon as we are able suggests, if we really do love Jesus, then we absolutely, no questions asked, out of sheer inability to do anything but, **must love one another.**

And let me tell you, Jesus knew well, that as short, and sweet, and to the point as this commandment seemed, that it was actually the complex and big hope the entire universe up to that point had been holding out for. **This commandment to love one another as Christ loves us- REARRANGES EVERYTHING.**

This kind of love forces us to imagine a WHOLE DIFFERENT IMAGE FOR WHAT THE WORLD SHOULD LOOK LIKE. It's not even enough to switch the tiles around in every direction- we need to build a whole new picture piece.

That is what Christ came to do for us.

That is what his 3 years of traveling down dusty roads performing healings, and feeding masses, and raising people from the dead was all about.

That is what Easter is all about.

What is resurrection but one giant rearrangement puzzle?

But, dear ones, we are NOT going to get there by this world's attempts- not with every best human attempt if we do not listen for the very Spirit of truth's guidance. We cannot become a resurrection kind of people- we cannot love with our whole selves the way that Christ loves us- the way that Christ intends for us to love one another, if we are more tethered to our pride, our stubbornness, our freedom, or our pocketbooks, than we are to the very one that abides right within us.

We absolutely CANNOT love the way Christ commands on our own. We can't. **And we do not have to.**

I will not leave you orphaned.

Christ promised us this gift of an advocate- a helper-the very Spirit of truth to rest right IN us- for us to see and know so that we can BE rearrangers in this world without being OF THE WAYS OF THIS WORLD that draw us farther from God and one another.

So children of God- followers of Jesus- Resurrection, rearranging puzzle people-

Continue to stay in relationship with the very God who promises to be right with us.

Keep gathering around God's holy word- be it over YouTube or Zoom or 6ft, masked doorstep deliveries.

Spend time in scripture and daily devotion.

Pray with and for one another- maybe especially for the ones we have the hardest time understanding.

Practice joyful generosity in whatever ways we can find.

Serve one another in all the ways that are safely possible.

Make time to gather in Christian community through phone, video chat, or hand written notes.

These are important components to a life of discipleship and they keep us rooted to the very one who promises to guide us along the way, and they are all the more important in this season of our lives.

We were right 6 weeks ago- in our fresh hopefulness- **we ARE all in this together. Jesus is in this with us.** Jesus promised we would not be orphaned. Jesus promised to love us and reveal himself to us. So keep that commandment. **Love one another.** Amen.