

Sermon for Easter 5C
Trinity Episcopal Church Lawrence, Kansas
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue
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How do you tell a disciple of Jesus Christ? Jesus himself answers the question in a few words: “And now I give you a new commandment; love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, *then everyone will know that you are my disciples.*”

Love is the hallmark of Christianity. It is the I.D. of discipleship, the true identification by which one who is in union with Christ is recognized in the world. Jesus commanded his disciples to love!

But what kind of love is it that has to be commanded? Surely not the type celebrated in romantic songs, novels, and movies. That kind is commended, but not commanded. No, it's a tougher, less attractive strain more in the category of justice, compassion, and acceptance. It is the kind of love Jesus has for us. In the words of H.H. Farmer, “The Christian doctrine of love is not a glib and easy doctrine. There is at the heart of it the cross.” The cross is the ultimate payment in the high cost of loving. This is the unlimited love Jesus has for us and we are commanded to show that kind of love for one another. If we do *not*, we will not be recognized as his disciple. If we do, it will be the one sure sign of the truth of our claim to discipleship.

How does the love you show for others measure up when compared to Christ's love for you? Sometimes we look pretty good. Sometimes we know the love is there and showing forth nicely. But other times we slip and the tragedy is that when we do we are prone to do that which Christ would never do; we try to justify our unloving actions and secure our position of power by saying, “Well, I love you, *but...*” And that's the way so-called holy wars get started. That's the way relationships are shattered. That's the way communities of faith become little more than civic clubs.

When Jesus told his disciples, “You must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect,” he was referring to this radical command to loving one another. We usually think of perfection in terms of the Latin sense of the word meaning “completed without error.” But in the New Testament, it is the Greek sense of the word that is used, meaning “maturity.” So, if your love is not perfect, as perfect as the Love of Jesus for you, then you still have some maturing to do. And, in order for us to grow toward maturity, we have to be constantly reminded of the love of God in Christ Jesus. This is why we are summoned to gather week by week for the Apostles' teaching and the breaking of the bread. This Sacrament is the reminder and the promise and the real experience of Divine Love. When we as a community join around the Lord's Table, we receive his love. The formula is simple; the more we receive his love, the more loving we become.

On the southern border of the Empire of Cyrus, there lived a great chieftan named Cagular, who tore Cyrus' army to shreds and completely defeated the various detachments sent to subdue him. Finally, the emperor, amassing his entire army marched down, surrounded Cagular, captured him, and brought him to the capitol to be tried and executed.

On the day of the trial, Cagular and his family were brought to the judgment chamber. Cagular was a fine looking man of more than six feet in height, with a noble manner about him, a magnificent

speciman of a man. Cyrus was so impressed with his appearance that he said to Cagular, “What would you do should I spare your life?”

Cagular replied, “Your Majesty, if you spared my life I would return to my home and remain our obedient servant as long as I live.”

Then the Emperor asked, “And what would you do if I spared the life of your wife?”

Without hesitation, Cagular said, “Your Majesty, if you spared the life of my wife I would die for you.”

So moved was the Emperor Cyrus that he freed them both and returned Cagular to his province to act as governor. Upon arriving at home, Cagular reminisced about the trip with his wife. “Did you notice,” he said to his wife, “the marble at the entrance of the palace? Did you notice the tapestry on the walls as he went down the corridor into the throne room? And did you notice the chair on which the Emperor sat? It must have been carved from one lump of pure gold.”

His wife could appreciate his excitement and how impressed he was with all of it. But she only replied, “I really didn’t notice any of that.”

“Well,” said Cagular in amazement, “what did you see.”

His wife looked seriously into his eyes and said, “I beheld only the face of the man who said he would die for me.”

Come here today and behold the face of the One who died and rose again for you. Let the power of his love unite us with one another so that everyone can tell for sure that you are his disciple!