

Sixth Weekend of Easter (RCL/A): "Love Shows Up"  
Acts 17:22-31; John 14:15-21  
May 9-10, 2026  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Mother's Day, May 10, 2020. Who remembers what **your** Mother's Day was like, exactly six years ago?

This picture hangs in the parsonage kitchen. It's the Mother's Day card Kristiane gave me in 2020. On the left is a drawing of a big duck being hugged by a little duck, the duckling's webbed feet swept off the ground with the enthusiasm of the embrace! On the right is the message:

Mom,

Well... this sure is a Mother's Day for the books. I'm hoping my cooking makes up for the whole pandemic thing 😊.

Thank you for being my momma! Happy Mother's Day!

Love,  
Kristiane  
(+ Bear + Deb +Little Girl) [our 2 dogs and the cat]

Kristiane was living and working in the City, so she took a COVID test and made sure it was negative before she came home. Maybe that routine sounds familiar, if you had family members living elsewhere who came home for various holidays. Mother's Day was the first time since lockdown that I'd been within hugging and breathing distance of my daughter. She'd popped by for my birthday a couple weeks after lockdown began, but stayed on the other side of the fence and put my gift in a bag I retrieved after her departure. It was the birthday of the airhug. She insisted on the physical distance, for fear of infecting Mark & me, even though she'd tested negative. Her protectiveness warmed my heart, even though I sorely wanted a hug!

We thought lockdown would last a few weeks, then it became a few months, and more. The only ones present in this sanctuary for months were the worship team, a skeleton crew of devoted folks who made livestreamed worship possible for the many folks who logged in from home. (Our livestream capability was definitely the silver lining of the very dark cloud of COVID.) Eventually we were allowed to welcome other worshipers into the sanctuary, but not **that** many, so we required RSVP's and even made seating charts for a brief time! "Sit here! Don't sit there!"

Gradually we reopened the doors wide. Some of you reentered the sanctuary after months away and you cried for joy, to be in this beloved space, to receive the Lord in Holy Communion again, to be **in person** with our faith family. Nothing takes the place of physical presence: with our loved ones, with each other, and with the Lord in this holy Supper.

Last week, this week and next, we're hearing from St. John's Gospel: part of our Lord's "farewell discourse" at the Last Supper, His final teaching, His "taking leave" before the crucifixion. His message to His closest followers concerns them:

*"Little children, I am with you only a little longer... 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'" (John 13:33)*

What would we say?? **"Don't go!!!"** But in today's Gospel (John 14:18-19) Jesus says:

*"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live."*

Jesus is clarifying He's not **abandoning** His followers, His friends. In place of His physical Self, He'll ask His Father to send the Holy Spirit, sometimes called the Presence of the absent Christ.

When you're physically separated from loved ones, how do you keep the connection?

- Call
- Facetime
- Text
- E-mail
- Even write a snail mail letter!
- Send gifts

Jesus keeps the connection by giving us Himself, His Body & Blood, in the Eucharist. He and the Father also give the Gift of their Holy Spirit, whom Luther said "calls, gathers and enlightens us" to be the Body of Christ in the world, for the sake of the Kingdom!

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you." (John 14:15-17)*

Notice that Jesus doesn't say He loves us **because** we keep His commandments. He says that if **we** love **Him**, we **will** keep His commandments! God's love isn't tethered to our performance; that would be works righteousness, an attempt to **earn** Heaven, which is impossible. Heaven is pure gift, not a reward for good behavior. ("Good thing, since we could never be "good enough.")

At baptisms, weddings, funerals (even Christmas and Easter), I can pretty well look out on the congregation and guess who's here under duress or only because of an obligation to be polite and present for whatever the family member or friend's ritual of passage happens to be, or because a parent insists that presents will not be opened until Christ's birth is honored and Christ is worshiped. (Not a bad expectation, actually.) **We** wouldn't be here today if we didn't already love God. But Jesus continually invites us to **deepen** our love, draw ever **closer** to Him, **obey** His commandments more fully and more faithfully. At Bible study we talked about how the commandments are all about protecting and deepening our relationship with God and with each other. True, they **are** undeniably a set of **rules**, but they're rules that guard and defend **relationships**. We've got the basic 10, given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, then we've got the top 2 that summarize the 10 (love God above all else and our neighbors as ourselves). Then we've got the "new" commandment, that we should love each other as Jesus has loved us. We need **grace** to even **begin** to love in that way; the Holy Spirit is the Source of that grace. The "means of grace," channels through which the unmerited love of God flows into our hearts and lives, meant to flow **from us to others**, are the Word of God and the Sacraments: Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Don't be a stranger this summer! Spend even half as much time reading or listening to Scripture or other spiritual devotional stuff as you spend scrolling through TikTok or news feeds. Reading or listening to soul food can even be done on the beach or out on the water! And continue to worship. No one will ever convince me we can worship as wholeheartedly while fishing or golfing or gardening as we do in this sanctuary. We may say a fleeting prayer of thanksgiving for a beautiful summer day or a heartfelt prayer for a big tuna or a hole-in-one, but that's not quite the same level of commitment as devoting the precious gift of time here, is it?

**There's no substitute for physical presence.** Even when Kristiane couldn't come any closer than the other side of the gate during early lockdown, even the sight of her was a total gift. Even when we show up here tired or distracted by worry or mentally reviewing our to-do list for the rest of the day or evening, we **are** loving the Lord by our action and not just in our words. We are putting our faith where our mouth is. We are loving our Savior and we are obeying a commandment He held near and dear to His own heart when He lived on this earth: that we should honor the Sabbath and devote ourselves regularly to worshiping the God who gave us life as surely as our mother did.

It is in worship that we are most powerfully shaped: individually as little Christs and corporately as the Body of Christ, the beloved community that exists for the praise of God and for the sake of the world. *“Wherever two or more of you gather in my name, there I am in your midst.”* (Matthew 18:20) Our Lord longs for us and for our presence. He longs to reveal Himself to us. That happens most predictably, most powerfully, through community, in Holy Communion, and through His holy Word. The door is always wide open, worship and Bible study will be happening, all summer. Don’t self-isolate, don’t quarantine yourself. Love the Lord; keep His commandments, honor the Sabbath; keep it holy, even at the Shore, in the summer. Love shows up. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham