

Date: September 13, 2026 (Pentecost 16)

1. Texts: Exodus 14:19-31; Ps. 114; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: centrality of love to the Christian faith.
4. Aim: challenge.
5. Proposition: "Love must be visible and tangible if it is to be genuine."

VISIBLE, TANGIBLE LOVE

We all know that love is the centre of Jesus' gospel.

[Jesus] said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."¹

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.²

We've heard this. We know this.

We even have some understanding of how to obey Jesus' command to love.

We start with unlimited forgiveness. We build on that by living and giving generously. We assess our love using our ability to sacrifice on behalf of others. If we can manage those three steps, we'll be well on our way to loving God and others as Jesus would have us do.

But the Church and every disciple runs into a whole lot of difficulty when some people assume that others are actually undeserving of love. You know: when non-European immigrants are threatened with deportation. We see the difficulties when people of non-Christian faiths are hassled or oppressed. The love of Christ is drowned out by the shouts of those whose ideologies exclude and denigrate others.

¹ Matthew 22:37-40.

² John 15:12-13.

So, we all know of God's commands to love. We all have some idea how to practice such love. But we see the barriers some people build as they deny love to some groups and individuals.

As faithful Christians we have to be clear about the centrality of love. If we are followers of Jesus Christ, then that faith relationship obligates us to loving others in the same way that Jesus loved us. And, how did Jesus love us? By giving up his earthly life. He loved us by ministering to others for the three years of his adult ministry. He loved us by sacrificing his life for the sake of our salvation.

This love is not optional. Christians cannot choose *if* they will love others as Christ has loved us. When we choose to become Christians, we take on this obligation. Christ himself has mandated it for each believer.

This love is also not a theory or even a theology. Love is not a philosophy about which books should be written. Such love is our practice, our lifestyle, and our existence. The love of Christ is to be experienced by others through us, through our words and actions. Christian love is made genuine and real in our practice, our behaviours and our proclamations in words and deeds. Christian love is always tangible, visible and experiential.

So, this is the point at which we have to reflect on *how* we're going to make all this come true for us. We have to uncover the how of our personal lives, our public lives and our attitude towards those who deny and reject Christian love.

We would experience more success with the how of our personal lives, if we focussed on those relationships where love is more difficult. You see, we can easily love those we're expected to love. We know how to love family, friends and neighbours. We'll grow more if we pay attention to how we love those people we find more difficult to love.

Now, you've just thought of someone you know who fits into this difficult category. So, without compromising your faith, choose now to sacrifice your own dislikes and assumptions. Let go of whatever resentments are inhibiting the flow

of tangible love. Look for ways to sacrifice yourself, your needs and desires, so that the love of Jesus can flow through you to that person.

But please remember: this is not a sentimental approach. The other person has to experience your loving sacrifice in tangible ways. Christian love is experienced through the words and actions of the disciple.

In a parallel way, Christian love is to be experienced in our society and public lives. Yes, North America likes to think that faith is private, but that's rubbish. Imagine if you were to marry the love of your life, but never tell anyone, never celebrate it with anyone, never live together as a married couple. That's just wrong. Love demands that it be shared in public. The marital relationship demands that the society and the public recognize it.

So it is with our faith. The love from and for Christ demands that we share it publicly. Our public involvements, our public conversations and even our politics must become channels for the love of Christ. The nature and identity of Jesus must be made tangible and visible in our public pronouncements and activities.

In the current political climate, the necessity of experiencing the love of Christ in public ways is becoming ever more critical. We disciples of Jesus are obligated to fight against hate and prejudice. The love of Christ in us forces us to stand up against oppression and discrimination, even if we then become the victims of the same. God himself has defined love as inclusive and all-embracing. The love we channel from Christ to others is love for all others, including people of other faiths, citizenship and ethnicities. God's love flows to us and through us to others, even those with whom we strongly disagree. God's love is for us all and from us to all.

And again, that inclusive, active and genuine love must be seen, heard and experienced. It is never enough to claim to be loving while keeping that love hidden. The public face of Christ's love must be visible and audible. People have got to see and experience it in meaningful ways, even if such ways are judged by others to be unacceptable.

Being loved by Jesus has transformed us. We have been loved by him and so re-created as the channels for his love. We have been saved by him and so have been made the ambassadors for his love. We apply this truth in our own lives and share it with those around us. That's just the way it is. That's a big part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Let's pray that we can follow him, in word and deed, for the remainder of our lives.

AMEN.