Sermons at Christ Church

Be God's Light That Shines In The darkness.

Easter VI
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Love is the test, and it is the only test members of the emerging community of believers and gentiles have to meet. The new community is like a mother who gives birth to a child or multiple children and has to balance her love for each child. No one child receives more love than the other, each child receives enough for the child to believe that he or she is loved. Each child knows that he or she is loved unconditionally. The new community of believers and gentiles is like a mother, my mother who had to be blinded by love. Love that is blind is the kind of love that keeps giving, and giving without counting the cost. Love that is blind is the kind of love that gives of itself without any thought about whether the recipient deserves it or not. Love that is blind is the kind of love that lays itself down for the other.

I am sure you have heard of the cliché, love is blind. The self-giving nature of love makes it reasonable to characterize love as blind. Love is blind to all human categories, yes, even the gentile believers can now receive baptism because the Holy Spirit has fallen on them also. Like Lady Justice who wears a blindfold, holding a scale which projects the ideals of equal justice for all, love is so blind that it opens our eyes to see ourselves in our neighbors. Love is so blind that it takes us by the hand and walks us to places where our only task is to express love's life. Love is so blind that it causes us to find our joyous fulfillment not in how much we have or possess but how much we give. Love is so blind that the only commandment love has given us is to participate in this blind act of love. That is the test we have to meet-to love blindly.

Growing up, I lived with my mother and my siblings in my grandfather's house. All slept on the hard wooden floor. My mother always worked hard to ensure we had the basic necessities of life. Times were often rough. I knew my mother did her best. There were days when creditors would come by the house demanding their money. Some of them will scream on top of their voices, quarrel with her about the delay in redeeming her debt or they will depart peacefully after a promise of payment. Those moments were always embarrassing but we also knew that she didn't take out those loans to splurge on herself, all she did was to make sure that her children had something to eat.

I don't remember hearing my mother ever tell me or any of my siblings that she loved us. It was assumed that we were loved, not by what was heard or said, but by what was done for us. I can only look back at those years with a heartfelt gratitude that my mother did love me and my siblings in a way that was incredibly special.

My experience with my mother opened my eyes to the reality that the value of love is not dependent on what the mouth can or cannot say, but on deeds, actions-what is done and what is left undone.

The test of love depends on our ability to act on it, to give it, to offer it. That is why John reminds us about God's love for the world, for you and me, was such that He had to act on that love in the giving of His Son. That was the only tangible expression of God's love-God had to meet that test Himself.

In today's gospel, Jesus-the embodiment of God's love, helps us to understand what the nature of the test is. He tells us that he is able to love his friends simply because of the Father's love for him-not because of his love for himself. And because he lived that love and understood the transformative power of that love, he only gives his friends but one command-love one another. A message so simple, so pure and life changing. Love is the test, and it is within the context of a self-giving love that his friends, including you and I, can find fulfillment and our joys be made complete.

Jesus also teaches one important lesson, he holds his own life as a model of love-greater love has no one than the one who lays down his life for his friends-the one who is so motivated and blinded by love that he or she carries within the self the life of the other. Put simply, words alone do not and cannot tell the full story of love, words must be backed by our actions, actions of self-giving love-that is the test.

All too often the power of love astounds us just as it did in the story we read in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter preaches the good news of salvation to both believers and gentiles, in the course of his preaching the Holy Spirit falls on the gentiles. The circumcised believers are in disbelief-surprised that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured on the gentiles. How dare the Holy Spirit come upon these folks who have not been circumcised? How dare these people speak in tongues? How dare they manifest the gift of the spirit?

This text reveals that the circumcised believers assumed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was a preserve of the circumcised alone. They thought that the door was closed for others to access the same gifts that they had. They didn't realize that just as we cannot choose our mothers, we don't choose God, it is God who chooses us and empowers us with the gifts of bearing fruits that last.

They didn't know that the gift of salvation has been widely given to all those who have faith in the Lord Jesus-all those who believe in the commandment to simply love one another. They did not understand that for the new community and any community to be alive and grow, love has to be the only test. And it is the only test because it is the only gift, the one gift that everyone, all of us-rich, poor, Black, White, Democrat, Republican, Gay, Straight –everyone, has in equal amount, and it is the only gift that gives life to any community or relationship. It is the only test.

There is a story of a husband who on New Year's Eve went out to buy two dairies for himself and the wife. Later that night they went to watchnight service. When they returned home, the man pulled out the two dairies and invited his wife for a conversation. The man told the wife that he bought the dairies for score keeping. He wanted her to write down on whichever day, any mistakes or failures because he will be doing the same, and at the end of the year, they will figure out who among them committed the most mistakes. Days rolled into weeks, weeks rolled into months and before long, they had celebrated Christmas and were ready to usher in the New Year.

On New Year's Eve, they went to church and upon return from church; the man invited the wife and asked if she remembered the dairy he gave her the previous year. She responded that she remembers. The husband then asked her to bring out the dairy. The wife went for her dairy and they both settled down with their dairies. The husband indicated that he wanted to be the first to tell what the wife did the year before. And so he began. He went on and on and on about what the wife did and did not do from the beginning of the year till the end. When he was done, he asked the woman to also share what she wrote. The wife gladly gave him back the dairy.

The husband went into a fit, why are you giving me the dairy? You are supposed to tell me what I did. The wife responded that she did not write anything in the dairy. With a rising voice the man asked, what do you mean you didn't write anything in the dairy? You were supposed to write in the dairy. The woman simply stated, I did not write in it because it really did not matter. The woman went on, if I didn't love you, I would not be here. I love you that is why I am still here, and loving you means loving all your mistakes and so I did not write anything in the dairy. Love is the test we all have to meet.

And so on this Mother's Day, I pay tribute to all mothers and especially to the mother who taught me how to love, not only with what I say or do not say, but with what I do and how I give off myself. That to me is where real transformation occurs, that to me is the test we have to meet. On this and every day, I hope you rise up and dare to be motivated to love blindly, blindly enough to meet any challenge that the test poses to you. Happy Mother's Day. Amen.