Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Please be seated.

Raise your hand if you consider yourself a follower of Jesus. Looking around I see a lot of raised hands and I assume that those of you at home are also raising your hands.

Today's gospel reading from the gospel of Saint Mark contains three descriptions of people who followed Jesus.

In the first we hear of the disciples returning from their missionary work. Jesus had sent them out two by two and gave them authority to proclaim that all should repent, cast out many demons, and anoint with oil many who were sick and cure them. Now in today's gospel reading the disciples have returned from their missionary work. They have shared with Jesus and each other everything that had happened as they had followed the call that Jesus had given to them. Imagine how they must have felt. They had seen the amazing miracles of love that Jesus himself had performed. People who had been ill or disabled for years, decades, healed with just a touch or a word. And they themselves had gone out and because of their faith they had been able to do the loving work of healing others that Jesus had called them to do. Although the work must have been challenging for the disciples, it also must have been full of love and joy.

Jesus decides that they should withdraw to have a time of rest together, but we are told that many people saw them and followed from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. This is the second instance in the gospel reading where we see a group of followers of Jesus. And when Jesus sees this crowd that had followed him, rather than turning them away, he has compassion for them and stops and begins to teach them. Many in that crowd who were following Jesus must have heard something in his teaching that inspired them to go out and share what they had heard with others.

And at the end of the gospel we hear the third description of followers of Jesus as Jesus and his disciples come to Gennesaret. We are told that once again people recognized Jesus. They rushed about the entire region and began to bring the sick to wherever he was. And wherever he went,

they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed. Although Mark does not tell us what happened after these particular people were healed, we know from other healings in the gospels people were so moved after being healed they had to go out and share the good news of Christ with those they encountered. To share with others the experience of God's love that they had had.

Jesus gives to all who follow him then and now the roadmap to being his follower in the great two commandments: you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And the second commandment is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The way of love to which Jesus calls his followers is very specific. It is not the same as romantic love, or brotherly love, or even love of our family. It is a form of love greater than all three of those combined. In Greek the word for this type of love is agape. This is the unconditional love that God has for each person in this world and that God calls us to offer to each person we encounter.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, in his book *Love is the Way*, describes agape as "love for the other - sacrificial love that seeks the good and wellbeing of others, of society, of the world." Curry goes on to say "You may not have heard the Greek word before, but you've experienced agape. Think about someone who impacted your life for the good. Someone who stood by you, pushed you, believed in you, maybe even sacrificed for you. Odds are they weren't doing it because it served them. They were doing it because they cared about you. Because they wanted life's sweetness to be open wide to you. Love is a firm commitment to act for the wellbeing of someone other than yourself." In short this is what Bishop Curry calls the way of love.

Can you think of a time when someone acting in the way of love impacted your life for the good? Perhaps it was your parent, a teacher, a stranger, a fellow member of Christ Church.

Let me share two examples of how people in my life active in the way of love for me. My father was a history teacher at the Episcopal Academy outside of Philadelphia. As children of a teacher my brother and I were able

to attend the school at no cost. My father died when I was 11. Normally this would have meant that my brother and I had to leave the school because we no longer had a parent who was teaching there and were no longer eligible for the free tuition. However, several of his friends got together. They went to the headmaster and the board of trustees to ask them to allow us to continue as students at the school at no cost. That request was granted. At a time when our lives were already in upheaval and turmoil, others stepped forward in an act of love to support our wellbeing.

You have all heard me talk before about my kidney transplant. But I hope you won't mind if I talk about it for a moment again. Eleven months ago I received a kidney donated by my friend Jean. What greater example of sacrificial love could there be than to give up a part of your body to another so that they can live. Jean's example of agape not only restored my health but also has led me to be able to follow God's call for me to begin the process of becoming a deacon.

In the gospels Jesus models this type of love for us over and over through his loving actions. In today's reading the crowd had followed Jesus. He changes his plans to rest because he has great love for each person in the crowd. Although it was omitted from this morning's reading not only does Jesus teach this great crowd who follows him, but he also feeds them in what we know of as the feeding of the 5,000. In the feeding of the 5,000 we see the way of love in action. Jesus loves those who have come to him. They are hungry and without much food. He tells the disciples to gather any food and those who have food, albeit a meager amount, share it. He prays over the food. And then each person in the crowd does their part in loving each other by sharing it. In the end there is enough for everybody with more than an abundance leftover. The story of the feeding of the 5,000 is about God's abundant love for his people, their love for God, and their love for each other.

When we love God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds, and all our strength and we love our neighbors as ourselves that is the way of love, the way of Jesus. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be part of the way of love and to call others to the way of love that seeks the good and wellbeing of others, of society, and of the world. My family in Christ, may you walk always in the way of love.

Amen