

**“Love” – Rev. Jennifer Adams**  
**May 17, 2009 - Easter 6B**

Here’s one of the things I find most beautiful and most amazing about our faith. You enhance my relationship with God. In fact I depend on you to build and strengthen and broaden my experience of and my knowledge of God. Think about that for a minute. I have a couple of degrees in theology, have taken and passed varieties of exams on what professional theologians have written about God and what the church believes and how the church should act. And I read a lot. And like many of you, I can rattle off creeds and doctrines and articles of faith, but when it comes right down to it, what I need in order to be true to this journey is you. What we need (in the best sense of that word – not in any co-dependant or overly sentimental sort of way) what we need is each other. And I find that beautiful and amazing.

That’s what this gospel passage is all about, and actually the lesson from Acts and the Epistle reading were about this too. As church we can define ourselves and structure ourselves in any number of ways and there are endless numbers of “Church Help” programs to guide us in that process. We can label ourselves a family church or a pastoral church or a program church based on our size, structure and level of activity. We can call ourselves mainline, or mainstream, or traditional or conservative or evangelical or high or low. We can lean entirely into our Episcopal identity while we consider movements like “the Emergent Church” or the “Practicing Church” or the “Post Modern Church” -- and a lot of those explorations and models can help us understand ourselves and where we’re headed. BUT this week we get a reminder of what ultimately defines us in our core: we are a people committed to abiding in God’s love, living as friends and loving one another. It’s as simple and as challenging as that.

And what I find amazing and beautiful and both confidence building and terrifying is that the whole mission of this place rests entirely on those things: we can have endless programs, additions popping out in every direction, amazing renovations, resources coming out of our ears, pews packed to the hilt every week and while none of those things are bad (and many of them are very good,) they’re not ends in themselves – the only end is the only beginning– God’s love for us and our love for one another. And every now and then we need a moment to regroup ourselves in that place, to re-establish priority number one. To look around and see one another and God’s presence among us as the way forward in all of the mission and ministries we do.

And so we’re going to do something a little crazy this morning and I know I am pushing it a bit for the middle of an Episcopal liturgy but knowing names and touching hands is a first step toward being friends. So I’m going to take a minute and ask you to introduce yourself to the people next to you and the people behind you. So stand up! Shake hands! Introduce yourself and smile. . . .

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Whoa. Whoa! Don’t get too carried away! So, what’d you think? Kind of like the peace but with introductions added for the sake of knowing who is by you. For the sake of knowing who is with you and with whom you are with. It’s how we begin to know each other, to love each other. And it’s a good reminder that we all abide in the love of God. Now the next step is do this at coffee hour too – take a leap and consider shaking the hand of someone you didn’t sit by during the service -- and do this at movie nights and evening classes too and how about every time we

gather? Pretty soon it won't be just "Hi I'm Jen. . .It will be how are you? Or What do you need? Or Can we help?" "I have called you friends," Jesus said. "So bear fruit." And among all of the important things that we do, this is the fruit that will last for sure.

So, as we celebrate the end of another program year and there is much to celebrate and many to thank – As we begin planning for another program year – knowing that there are huge and wonderful things to look forward to -- As we prepare to celebrate the long ministry of the Grace Christian Child Care Center and launch that ministry of ours out into the world -- As we embark on a period of strategic planning and visioning toward the future -- Even as we simply go on with our day-in day-out life as Grace Church remember that the most important thing we can do is remember that God loves us and to share stories with one another about how we know that and believe it to be so. The most important things we can do involve taking a few minutes here and there to share our names, to share pieces of our lives, to offer ourselves to one another and whoever walks through our doors. To befriend one another as Christ has befriended us. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be known not only as beautiful church with the red doors but as that church where they know how to love? That church that does love out in the world? That church that abides in something greater than themselves?

There are more efficient, probably even smarter ways to be in this world, more pragmatic ways to go about being church, and there are certainly a whole lot of easier ways to be community. But in the name of love we are church. We'll know we are forgiven by it. We'll know redemption and salvation and reconciliation and peace because of it. We'll come to know one another and God through it. And it's how they'll know we are Christians – it's by this love.

Amen.