



A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
by **The Reverend Maureen L. Martin, *Priest Associate***

The 5th Sunday of Easter (Year C)
15 May 2022

I come to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Does it surprise you, like it surprises me, that Jesus is giving this new commandment to love one another? Because I kind of feel like He already told me that. But here He is together with Him, in this brief period of time after Jesus has gone out to do the thing He can't escape from. And so Jesus says to the disciples, "I give you a new commandment." Now, they don't understand yet what is going on around them, the way that the death of Jesus is like a trap that has been set, and a trap He has decided not to escape. And so he's preparing them for something really difficult, which is to love those who are at the center of your lives, in every circumstance, until the very end, no matter what may come to pass. It's interesting, I don't know about you, and you don't need to raise your hands, but if you think back on your own life, have you ever found it easier to be loving to the people who do not live under your own roof?

You didn't have to admit to that. Have you ever been short-tempered towards your kids in the car, and then as friendly as can be to the cashier at the drive-through window? I know these are lighthearted examples, but I cannot be the only person in this room who has ever felt stabbed in the heart when I've come to that realization that I've been more kind to the total stranger than to the little person in the backseat. Now, thank God we can't fully imagine what the disciples went through, that we all have our trials in this life. The one, Jesus, who has shown them exactly how radical love can be, and His perfection of love for them is going to love them all the way to the end. Most of us will never be put into life and death situations like these. Though, when they happen, we usually handle them just fine. We get through the hardships in our life, right? Instead, we find the daily requirement of love sometimes becomes a grind, even if we're too embarrassed to admit it.

Now, we would gladly do the heroic thing, give a kidney to a loved one, throw ourselves in front of a bus for a little kid like you see in the news. And yet, just simply unheroically loving one another can



sometimes be the hardest thing we do all day. I don't know about you, but sometimes I become short-tempered over the dumbest of things, when I'm around the people I love the most. The love that Jesus had for His disciples was unlimited, unconditional and completely free of obligation, as God's love is for us. In Jesus' example of love, we see that God's love for us as pure grace, unwarranted and generous, a love which sees none of these superficial differences that we see in one another. And that's the hardest kind of love to accept. Jesus knew this kind of love was going to be hard for the disciples and for the church, and for practically everyone, forevermore.

So we are reminded through His words, that this kind of everyday unconditional love will feel new to us in our lives every time we are called to it, every time we need to recommit to loving those that are the closest to us. Now, Drew and I have many conversations about what it means to live in community and to love one's neighbor. And in a recent conversation, we talked about the importance of wide margins of time and energy in our lives. It is when we treat our lives as nothing but a series of obligations that run right to the edge of the page of our lives, that we most often forget to love those who are near us. In her 1979 Noble Prize lecture, Mother Teresa talked about the importance of love beginning in the home, and how the greatest poverty can be found in the wealthiest of homes, where there is no joy, only work and an unending concern for appearances.

She went on to say that it is when we see God in those around us, that we begin to really feel the kind of love that Jesus commands us to offer one another. So this is where the power of developing margins in our lives come in. Learning to say no to the non-stop obligations placed on us by the world gives us time to say yes to our families, and time to say yes to Jesus, as we learn to see Him in every face of everyone we love. Margins give us time to remember the importance of gratitude. They give us time to thank God for all the great things He has done in our lives, that otherwise we might take for granted. Margins also give us time to decide how we want to cultivate the lives of our families. Not just get through it, but cultivate it, develop it. Develop patterns and rituals with our children that connect us to one another, and connect us to God.

Margins give us the time to soften our spiritual soil, water our roots, and pray. God will give us the spiritual growth we crave, if we make room for Him to do so. So this is a great time of year to think about these things, to examine our lives and ask ourselves a few questions about how we prioritize our time. So spend some time this week, doing exactly what you always do. Don't change a thing, except bring a level of awareness to your daily grind and ask yourself, "Where are the margins? Where are the places that I'm inviting God into the life of my family? Where is my soil hard? And where is it soft?" The commandment to love those nearest to you is not about balancing one more thing on top of an



already full life. It's about lightening the load and delighting in the ways that love will let love in. This is a new commandment because every day is a new opportunity to love more deeply, and embrace the whole-hearted life that God intends for each of us to have. Amen.