

Give A Mom A Hug
John 15:9-17
Colebrook Congregational Church
Sixth Sunday of Easter / Mother's Day

Last Thursday at Barnes & Noble, I realized that my weekend was going to be pretty full, so I figured that I should take care of my Mother's Day present before leaving. I spent the shift choosing items for a gift bag, and as soon as I clocked out, I started putting it all together. I put a lot of thought into gifts, making sure it is something special or useful to whom I am giving it to, but not usually in its presentation. But this time, I wanted to do something special. I got a fancy flowery gift bag complete with ribbon and glitter, and also some gift wrap tissue paper. To the chagrin of the other Head Cashier, I tried to put everything together on the table in the Music Department. I called the result, "A gift bag only a mother could love." When I said that to my mom...she agreed.

Our selection this week comes from the second part of Jesus' Farewell Discourse, actually starting partway through Jesus' allegory about Christ's relationship with Christians, where the vine of Israel is pruned and made more fruitful. It is very similar to Paul's allegory about the body of Christ, but John includes love as the mark of this inward relationship with Jesus, and is my favored way of experiencing my relationship with Jesus. This sort of allegory would be very meaningful to those communities of John, where they have been expelled from the synagogues, and then ripped apart by the heresies of Docetism and Gnosticism.

The ending of that allegory and the start of our selection is the third result of ones' inward relationship with Christ. After Prayer in Christ's name, and observing the Commandment to Love, in imitation of Christ, Jesus now inspires the believers with His radiant joy. That joy then becomes the mark of the true church.

The next section, starting with verse 12, has a familiar commandment. Jesus instructs the community to love one another. Not everyone, like how the other Gospels put it, Love your neighbor as yourself, so this more insular, especially after the allegory of pruning the vine. Again, considering what that community was going through, it makes a certain amount of sense. But

also consider other parts of this Gospel where it is very clear that God's Love is truly for the whole of Creation, without limits.

This seemingly insiders-only does continue in the following verses, where Jesus is talking about friendship. The Greatest Love one can show is to lay down their life for their friends.

In Greek, the language of the New Testament, there are different words that describe the type or degree of a relationship that does not easily translate adequately into English, which end up being the same word. Take the word Love. There are at least five different words for Love in Ancient Greek. There is ξενια, ritual love between a host and visitor. Στοργη, a natural love, describing the relationships inside a family. Αγαπη, the divine love, love for God or God's love for us. Ερως, the romantic love. And φιλια, the brotherly & loyal love that one feels for friends, and it is even the word used for friend.

Friend is a word that is over-used today, especially to describe people that we only know in passing or on Facebook or other social media. I've heard people say, "We're friends, but not friend-friends," or "We're only Facebook friends, not real friends." These types of "friends" are probably not the type that Jesus meant when He talked about the believers being His Friends, involving a Love where one would lay down their life for them. Friend here is referring to a stronger and closer relationship than what we usually consider.

This also marked a change in the relationship between Jesus and His Believers. Before, the relationship was like that of a master-servant or teacher-student. Here, Jesus is elevating the the believers out of their subservient role, having shared everything with them, which is also a dig at Gnosticism, and they are now fully considered His friends, and He loves them. A Love so great, that He laid down His life for them.

Such a great love can be found in the relationship of mothers with their children.

Theresa told me a story about her mother. She had a high-paying job with

benefits, but it was in retail, so during an economic downturn, she was given a choice to either transfer to Springfield, uprooting her family again, or taking a lesser half-time position without benefits to stay where she was. If she gave up her job and benefits, she would need to find more jobs and be without health care, and be less self-sufficient. Theresa had moved around a lot as a kid, and was finally settled, at a high school where she could study what she liked, and had finally started to socialize and make friends. If they moved again, it would be starting over again for her. Her mother sacrificed her job and her health, which had started to deteriorate, to give Theresa a life where she finally got to start living.

On this Mother's Day, we should remember what Mothers sacrifice for their children, that ultimate love they show, which is very similar to the love that Jesus has shown for us. We should remember it, and thank the Mothers, and Give a Mom a Hug.

Prayers of the People

[PAUSE]

Lord, on this day set aside to honor and remember mothers, we give you thanks for our mothers. We are grateful that you chose to give us life through them, and that they received the gift of life from your hands, and gave it to us. Thank you for the sacrifices they made in carrying us and giving us birth.

We thank you for the women who raised us, who were our mothers in childhood. Whether birth mom, adopted mom, older sister, aunt, grandmother, stepmother or someone else, we thank you for those women who held us and fed us, who cared for us and kissed away our pain. We pray that our lives may reflect the love they showed us, and that they would be pleased to be called our moms.

We thank you for mothers. We thank you for all those who care for us in quiet, often unrecognized ways; we thank you for all those who care for others in patience and love. We are sorry for those times when we have failed to care for others and pray that you will teach us to care as you do and that you will hold all mothers and caregivers in the light of your presence and guide them to you.

We offer our prayers of thanks and love on behalf of ourselves and our neighbors, on behalf of your creation and our fellow creatures. God of mercy and healing, you who hears the cries of those in need, receive our petitions for help from your people, so that all who are troubled may know peace, comfort, and courage. We pray for all those who we hold in our hearts.

Open our hearts to your power moving around us and between us and within us, until your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and enemy, in communities transformed by justice and compassion, and in the healing of all that is broken.

Amen.