

Easter 6B 09 May 2021 (Mother's Day)  
John 15:9-17  
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*"I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."* Let's pray:

One of the enduring memories of my childhood is going fishing with my dad. We fished in creeks, rivers, and the ocean; from the bank, islands, wharves, out of small tinnies, large fishing boats and trawlers. But I never succeeded in convincing Dad to take me with him when he went on his 3-week expeditions out to "the Swains", a collection of coral reefs on the edge of the Continental Shelf, 150 miles offshore.

I love the ocean; it's always been a part of my life. I enjoy being on, in, and under the water. It can be beautiful, fun, exciting, mysterious, and liberating – until it's not. 150 miles offshore, on the edge of some of the deepest trenches on our beautiful planet, can be equally mesmerising in its solitude and downright terrifying when nature displays her power and might. I used to pray that Dad would be kept safe at sea and come home with lots of fish and stories, with the emphasis always on "come home."

I guess that's why I used to emulate him. In this photograph, I'm wearing my little brunch coat – just like Dad's. I'm holding his waterproof, floatable fishing lantern, and wearing his smelly old fishing hat on my head. I believed that somehow these things kept him close to me. Somehow, they maintained my connection to him, brought me comfort and reassured me that Dad would return home safely.

At a deeper level, imitating my dad revealed my desire to be connected, to be remembered, to have and to know my place in life. We all want that. Regardless of how old we are or the circumstances of our lives we want to know: Who am I? Where is my place in this world? What are the connections that will sustain my life? Sadly, as the health of my parents continues to decline, I find myself sharing the anxieties the disciples expressed.

These are the very questions Jesus addresses in today's gospel. It's the evening of the last supper. Jesus is speaking final words, one last sermon to his disciples. He is preparing them for life without his physical presence, foreshadowing what resurrected life, Easter life, is to be like. He offers some direct answers to those questions: You are my friends. Abiding love, laying-down-life kind of love, is the connection that will sustain you. I am your place in this world.

Most of us spend a lifetime searching for those answers and trying to incorporate them into our own lives. But they've got to become more than intellectual answers. They must become lived answers. We must learn to trust those answers by living in loving relationships with each other. Life is a school for learning to love. Death is a school for learning to live.

Our search for those answers is ultimately our searching for Christ. That searching never goes away and it becomes more acute in times of change: the death of a loved one, kids growing up and moving out, a new job, retirement, a debilitating illness, a move to a new town, a marriage or a divorce. In those moments we crave for something to hold onto, something to comfort, encourage, and reassure us; a smelly old fishing hat to guide us through life.

However, the smelly old fishing hat is just a crutch that we lean on but don't actually need. The more I think about those times when Dad used to go far out to sea, the more I realise that his fishing hat wasn't the thing that carried his presence. I was. My life, my actions, my very being somehow carried his presence and our shared love. The connection was and always had been within me; not a smelly old fishing hat.

Sadness, fear, loneliness, and desperation, often cause us to grasp for fishing hats in one form or another. We hope and try to create a connection that already exists, maintain a presence that is already eternal, and hang on to a love that is already immortal. We do this not only with one another but also with Christ. With each fishing hat we collect we forget or maybe even deny that our lives embody the shared and mutual love of Christ and one another. It's love that holds the fullness of presence; a presence, the disciples will learn, that transcends time, distance, and even death.

At some point we must throw away the old fishing hats we hold onto so that we can hear, experience, and live the deeper truth. Our lives, our actions, our love carry and reveal the presence of divine love. Jesus doesn't give us something, he says we are something. We are the gift. We are the connection. Listen to what he tells the disciples:

- I love you with the same love that the Father loves me. You have what I have.
- I give to you the joy that my Father and I share. You are a part of us. You are my joy, my life, and my purpose.
- I want your joy to be full, complete, whole, and perfect. You are my friends, my peers.
- I have told you everything. Nothing is held back or kept secret.
- I chose you. I picked you before the dawn of creation. I want you.
- I appointed, ordained, commissioned, and sent you to bear fruit, to love one another. I trust and believe you can do this.

It's all about us in the best sense of those words. We are the love of Christ in this world. Our belief in Jesus' words changes how we see ourselves, one another, the world, and the circumstances of our lives. That faith is what allows us to keep his commandment to love one another. When we know these things about ourselves our only response is to love. We can do nothing else. We are free to live and more fully become the love of Christ.

The challenge of our search is not to find the answers but to believe and live them. Who are we? The love of Christ. Where is our place in this world? The love of Christ. What are the connections that will sustain our lives? The love of Christ. In, by, with, and through the love of Christ “all shall be well, all shall be well, every manner of thing shall be well” (Julian of Norwich), to the glory of God, our Father. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.