

Easter 5C

April 24, 2016

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 11:1-18 Peter sees that Cornelius and his family receive the Holy Spirit.

Psalms 148 All creation praises God.

Rev 21:1-6 The home of God is among mortals. Jesus said, 'See, I am making all things new.'

John 13:31-35 The Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.

The Gospel lesson today includes the charge from Christ given on Maundy Thursday; "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." But this time, in the season of Easter, after the resurrection, in the context of the other readings, there is an intensity to the meaning of Christ's "new" commandment that I want to talk about today. From Revelation, Christ says, "See, I am making all things new." And from Acts, Christ's Spirit is given to all people, Jews and Gentiles.

From the OT, Leviticus 19:18 states, 'love your neighbor' in the context of being a rule. But now, Jesus is showing us what that looks like, in the flesh. This love of our neighbor is personal, intimate, even dangerous.

Jesus instructs us to exhibit a love of the type that he has shown for us, and that by doing that, everyone will know we belong to him.

This defines relationships that would have us invest ourselves in creating new ways to develop and execute intergenerational events so that we can know every member of every family that calls this place home, and that they get to know us.

This defines relationships that would have us spend energy producing connection with people attending AA groups here, so they know us by name, and know that we support them in their sobriety, and we care about them.

This is a relationship that drives us to not only send financial support to Kenyan boarding schools, but to know the names of the students, how big their families are, how far away the school is from their families, and what their favorite subject is in school. Our wonderful sponsors know most of these details; how can all of us share in the lives of these children?

Our search for these relationships leads us to explore exciting new programs, like Get on the Bus. Sr Elaine Coutu is with us this morning, and during our Coffee Hour will discuss with us the upcoming bus trip this coming Fathers' Day by families around the Bay Area to see their fathers in prison at Soledad.

In a recent meeting I attended some parishes described their sense of purpose by participating in a warming shelter program for the homeless during the cold

weather we have been getting. These programs are examples of the way we put our love for one another into action.

There is a relationship between you and me that Christ calls us to share; and it is deeper than being nice to each other. It is based on our seeing Christ in each other. We are to show that the love we have for Christ is the love we have for each other.

Jesus said that he and the Father are one. He also said that he is in us and we are in him. You and I are related to each other through that Godly love. We symbolize that connection every week when we exchange the peace. Through the Peace we are offering Christ's love to each other; and acknowledging the image of Christ that we see in each other. This blessing spreads mystically among all believers. It isn't necessary for us to exchange the Peace physically with every believer on the Earth, or even every believer in this Worship Space. Through the exchange of the Peace, and in the sharing of the Holy Eucharist, we are giving honor to the connection we have with each other, and with all believers in every place and throughout time, that comes from our relationship with Christ. The exchange of the Peace is an integral part of our liturgy of the Holy Eucharist, Eucharist meaning 'thanksgiving'; offering thanks to Christ for what he has done for us.

This community exudes a love for Christ, and a caring for each other that is genuine, powerful, and life-changing. I have heard that comment from first time visitors and from long-time members. It is a blessing that God has bestowed on us, and I feel that blessing every day. I see a challenge being given to us in today's Scriptures to be sure that our love for Christ is always looking outward, moving us to action, engaging all ages, inviting people to join us, challenging spiritual growth, and leaving a trail of God-incidents that we celebrate together.

Let us pray. Father God, we celebrate the amazing gift of your Son, who gave himself for the sake of his love for You and for us. May we recognize that gift, acknowledge the blessing, and value the Godly, transforming love that results from what he has done. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.