



**Seventh Sunday of Easter (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
The Feast of the Ascension
June 2, 2019
*The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector***

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Last Tuesday, I prayed Morning Prayer by using the website, Mission St. Clair. Morning Prayer began with the hymn, "For the beauty of the earth". That hymn is a favorite in the Episcopal Tradition and links us to the earth and gratitude to God for the many gifts we have been given.

The first stanza of the hymn text reads:

For the beauty of the Earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

The rest of the hymn goes on in a similar fashion with beautiful and upbeat language.

Just before praying Morning Prayer, I had watched the Weather Channel and coverage of devastation from tornadoes and floods in Kansas, Ohio, Oklahoma, Arkansas and elsewhere. I thought about all those thousands of people whose lives are being changed by weather patterns that are wreaking havoc across the nation. On Friday, the news of yet another shooting deeply saddened me: Breaking News: Twelve more innocence people killed by gun violence in Virginia Beach, such loss of life and such deep sadness, the 150th mass shooting just this year!

Last Sunday, I preached that one thing is clear, and that one thing is constant: "The love of God in Jesus is ours." Is that a message that our sisters and brothers in devastated communities can hear today?

At least in the natural disasters from which so many will need to recover, there is comfort in knowing that miraculously the loss of life has been minimal. There is comfort in knowing that "The love of God in Jesus is ours" and that nothing can take that away. That love is freely given to all, the good and the bad alike, as we were reminded by little Liam Hoyt last week during the Children's Message.

God's love falls on all of creation and on all God's creatures great and small. It falls equally, no matter what. It is ours in the good times and in the bad times of life.

Today, we are reminded that God's love showers the earth and all creation without exception. God's love in Jesus as experienced by the disciples was surely intense and even more so when the Spirit of God reigned into the hearts of all those gathered at Pentecost.

Today, we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus, forty days after Easter, a feast transferred from Thursday while we anticipate Pentecost next Sunday. We celebrate Jesus who lived among us and brought a new message, a new understanding and appreciation for what it means to love.

When the Scripture says, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”, I believe that means to strive with all one’s heart to love as God loves us. It is a challenge. It is a call to all of us who follow Jesus.

Walking in the ‘way’ of Jesus is not always easy. We are not called to be perfect but to strive to be as much like Jesus as possible. I have to admit that my own humanity too often gets the better of me. How about you? What about those times when we are not patient and kind, or when we are selfish and not other oriented? Do we strive to love as Jesus loved others and loves us?

I believe that God companions us in the journey of life and encourages us through grace to love as we are loved. We are called to support one another as we are supported by God and this community of faith. We are called to be examples of God’s love working in and through every fiber of our beings.

On this last Sunday of the Easter Season, the Church highlights the love exemplified in Jesus and his commitment to fulfill what he came to do on earth. He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets with a different twist. His law is the law of love. His prophetic voice calls us to love even those we find difficult to love. Are there individuals in your life who are difficult to love? Can we for a moment think that we just might be difficult to love as well, and if so, then, what?

On this day, we celebrate the Ascension. Jesus returned to be one with God in glory everlasting. That oneness explodes in a kind of miraculous light and fire when the Spirit of God descended at Pentecost. It is the Spirit of God for whom Jesus prepared the way. His disciples would be able to remember the love of God they experienced in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

On this day, we also celebrate the love of God through the life and ministry of our brother in Christ, Fr. Hugh Dickenson. This week, Fr. Hugh celebrates sixty years of commitment to God through his ordination to the priesthood.

Just imagine how many lives have been touched by Hugh’s journey in life! Just imagine how many lives have been changed because of the love that he has for God, God’s people and for his dear wife, Marge!

Sixty years ago, Hugh committed himself to a life of service. He continues to serve, and his presence among us is a great gift from God.

Just before we receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we hear: “The gifts of God for the people of God”. The bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Jesus, are amazing gifts from God. We take them and become one with them. We give thanks. We recognize that in receiving the “Bread of Life” and the “Cup of Salvation”, we become one with the love we celebrate as Jesus.

This week, how will you and I be the love of God in Jesus in our relationships, our homes, our workplaces and wherever we find ourselves? Will our words and our actions demonstrate love for others as we are loved by God? Will we allow our lives to be transformed by the love we experience in Jesus? Big questions! We have already been given the grace to answer them.

Thank you, God, for the gift of your love. Empower us to embrace it and go forth to be that love for the world. Amen.