

6 Easter May 14, 2023  
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**What Is In Between**  
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What does love look like? Does it have a shape? Does love have a color a texture? Is love heavy or light? Does it have a smell? Is it possible to taste love? How can we know or recognize love when we encounter it in our lives, relationships, interactions with strangers, at work, school, in stores, or even in church?

On the sixth Sunday in the Season of Easter, we hear the word *love* three times in the collect for the day. For those who appreciate the reminder, a collect is a special prayer that collects the themes and messages of the readings of the day. And today's Gospel begins and ends with Jesus talking about love. Love seems to be the stuff binding all the bits of today's liturgy together.

Of course, the love I am talking about and the collect and Gospel refer to is not the same thing as romantic love, parental or familial love, the love of friends, or love we have for our pets; but all those kinds of love can be partial expressions of what Jesus and the collect were talking about. The love of God manifested in Jesus himself. A selfless love that gives of Godself, a love that gives life, even in the face of death and loss, a love that forgives even the most painful rejection or abuse, a love that is God.

There is an element of mystery to this love, which is why it can be helpful to have tools or symbols to help us visualize or recognize it.

One symbol I have is a gift given to me many years ago when I graduated from seminary and was ordained a priest. It is in the shape of a cross. But instead of being made of metal or wood or glass or crystal, this cross is made of many small pieces of broken porcelain and pottery. The pieces do not fit together. They are diverse shapes and colors, different types of pottery or porcelain that have different textures. Some pieces have lovely flowers painted on them; others have words that are so broken apart I don't know what their message was. Some pieces are large and chunky, others tiny, almost dainty, and delicate.

Although all the pieces are different, together they are beautiful, held together in the shape of the cross. If these same pieces of pottery or porcelain were lying loose on the ground or in a box, they could easily be mistaken as worthless trash, broken bits of dishware that have no use and are only fit to be

thrown into the garbage. So, it seems the stuff that holds them together and gives them shape is what also makes them beautiful.

The stuff that literally holds the pieces of pottery together and gives them their shape is a type of cement. It is strong and durable without being too heavy. It is also gray, gritty, and rough to the touch. I don't know of many people who would call it attractive, but it is what holds all those pieces together, like the love of God holds all the different broken parts of our world and our lives together in love, giving us another chance, new life, and hope.

For me, the cement in between the pieces of pottery on the cross represents one way of visualizing what Jesus was talking about in today's Gospel: living the love of God. Today's Gospel is another smaller piece of what Biblical scholars call Jesus' farewell discourse, his speech to his disciples before his death and resurrection. The speech marked the ending of Jesus' earthly ministry and the transition into resurrection life here on earth. We are visiting this speech now because of where we are on the Church's calendar year. This coming Thursday will be the fortieth day after Easter Sunday, which is a significant holy day. It is the day we celebrate a mystery mentioned in the Nicene Creed: the ascension of Jesus. Ascension Day is described in the Bible as the day Jesus was lifted from earth in his incarnate and resurrected body to return to God.

While there is sadness in Jesus leaving, the words of today's Gospel speak to the transition of preparing those who follow him for the loss with the comforting assurance Jesus is not abandoning us to the wicked ways of the world. Through his resurrection something new has begun which his leaving doesn't negate. He will send the Holy Spirit who is both comfort and encourager so that we can continue to follow Jesus by recognizing God's life-giving Spirit when we encounter it and make our choices, words, and actions reflect that same love back into the world.

I find it interesting that a significant portion of the Easter Season is intentionally dedicated to transitions. The transition between Jesus' resurrection appearances to his followers and his ascension, and the transition between his ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Perhaps the Church is attempting to share the wisdom that a significant portion of our lives as followers of Jesus is learning to traverse times of transition. Times when we can't be certain of what will happen; or when we are waiting for what has been broken or repaired to heal, like after a surgery; or the season this diocese is currently in as it transitions into the next phase of a search for a new bishop, or the season we are

in as parish and priest as we transition into my leaving for a new parish and you will start your own discernment process. Although we know all these changes are going to happen, they haven't yet. It can be tempting to be impatient because the all the different pieces of these changes might not feel like they are fitting together yet, which can be uncomfortable. Yet, despite the feeling of discomfort, transition is a holy time.

Perhaps this time in our lives is when prayers like today's collect, Gospel and the cross of many pieces can all be the Holy Spirit reminding us that there is something stronger than uncertainty holding us all right now, something gritty that will not let us go. Something that can take difference and what seems disincorporate and make it beautiful by binding it together, like cement. That something is the love that begins and ends the Gospel of Christ, the love that can be seen between the spaces felt during all transitions and changes, the love that holds us all in the shape and image of God's love in Christ. Alleluia!