

**From the Father to the Son—From a Mother to Her Son**  
Homily for the Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year B) – John 15:9-17  
Gary Eichelberger – May 10, 2015 – Christ Church Greenville

In the name of God – Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the challenges of trying to communicate the Gospel – especially passages like today’s Gospel – is that so much of the emphasis is on this familiar word “love” – today, we are told that Christ has *loved* us as God the Father *loved* him, that we are to abide in Christ’s *love*, that we are commanded to *love* one another as we have been *loved*. And that, through our *loving* of another, we will bear fruit that will last.

It is a difficult concept to pin down – love. It can mean many different things in a multitude of contexts. We use the word to describe our relationship to everything from our casual relationships with food, sports teams, clothing, and even celebrities, to our most intimate and profound relationships with family, friends, and places.

But, in today’s Gospel passage, the emphasis is on the lineage of love—love that flows from God—on it being passed down—that we know love and understand love through its embodied progression—Jesus says to the disciples, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.” So we know this love – we know it because we have seen in it the relationship between the Father and the Son—and in how Jesus loved his disciples—and in how he loves us. And we, in turn, are to love one another – as the Father loves the Son – and as Jesus loves us – and as we have been loved by those who are seeking to follow him.

Through this, Jesus is expressing a fundamental truth about love, that we understand it by example. We can only know what it means to love by being loved, by seeing love, by being told stories of love. And, through the experience of love, we hopefully develop an ability to begin to understand its essence—its shape—such that we can realize it, recognize it, and then replicate it in our own lives.

Many years ago, when I was reaching the end of my sixth grade year in school, my best friend and I decided that, the following fall, we were going to join the middle school football team. We spent a lot of time in the intervening summer months talking a big game about all that we were going to accomplish when we joined the middle school football team—despite having not played previously—and despite being two of the smallest kids in the entire middle school.

So, early in our seventh grade year, we were preparing to make good on our promise to each other—and embark on our grand athletic adventure. But, when the time came to sign up, my friend came to school and told me that he was not going to be able to join the football team because he didn’t have the \$30 that it was going to cost for the physical exam required of every student who wanted to join the football team.

I remember going home after school that day and sitting in the kitchen and explaining to my mother how unfair it seemed that my friend wasn't going to be able to play football. I even wondered whether I should refuse to play if he wasn't going to be able to play.

And I remember my mother looking at me and then looking out the kitchen window toward to the big white barn behind our house. Then she looked back at me and said, "Gary, I know you are worried about your friend, but have you thought about how you are going to pay for your physical?" She knew I had not given that question a moment's thought. After letting that sink in for a moment—and perhaps enjoying the puzzled look spreading across my face, she said, "You know I've been wanting to get the chicken coop behind the barn cleaned out—and that's a pretty big job. But, if the two of y'all worked on it together after school for several days, I bet that the two of you could each earn enough money to pay for your physicals." I still remember the joy of that moment—as I realized what my mom had done.

So, after she called my friend's mom and explained to her the plan for how both of us would earn enough money to pay for our football physicals, we spent several afternoons cleaning out the chicken coop—and, though that may not sound like the most pleasant job – and it wasn't, we had a great time doing it—as we regaled each other and our captive audience of chickens with impressive tales of our soon-to-be legendary football careers. And, the following week, we realized our common dream of being football players—or at least being them in practice.

As you might imagine, the next part of this common adventure didn't turn out quite like we had imagined. Despite our plans for hearing the roar of the crowd chanting our names as we danced across the endzone, the fact was that we were small – and not particularly skilled in comparison to our teammates. So, we mainly watched from sidelines as a small crowd of loyal parents cheered for our teammates—and, then, when there were only a few plays left and the ultimate outcome was already settled, the coach would look over at us sitting on the bench and say, "Has anyone not played yet?" And we would jump up and go in – with no idea what positions we were even supposed to be playing – for our few moments of much-diminished glory.

But, as the season continued, I began to notice that my friend was, from time to time, getting sent in earlier in the game—and then my season thankfully ended early with a broken arm that allowed me a much-appreciated honorable excuse for why I wasn't on the field. Though my football career ended that year, my friend's had only just begun. And he went on to be the starting quarterback during his junior and senior years in high school—leading the team to back-to-back regional championships—and, though his football career almost never started because of a \$30 physical, he ultimately went to college on a football scholarship.

When my mother heard my plea for my friend in the kitchen many years ago, she could not have had any idea what kind of lasting fruit would be born from her response to me. As a parent now, I imagine that she had a hundred other things

occupying her concerns—that she had any number of other things that she needed to get done—that this problem was not on her calendar or her to-do list for the day. But she stopped and she listened. And then she quickly came up with a creative solution that offered dignity to everyone involved—to me, to my friend, and to my friend’s parents.

In that moment on that day, my mother continued the story of love—she was squarely in the midst of the lineage of love that flows from the Father to the Son—from the Son to his disciples—from his disciples to her—and, on that day, from a mother to her son. And, as a result, I have a better idea of what selfless love looks like—of what it feels like—of how to abide in his love—because I knew what it meant to abide in my mother’s love. And I learned how abiding in her love did not stop with me but also extended, through me, to my friends.

Many years later, when I asked her about that conversation—and told her about how much of an impression her response made on me—about how much of a witness she had been to me in that moment, she tried to give me the credit—saying that it was my concern for and love for my friend that had inspired her to try to come up with a solution. And, when she said that, I was reminded what it meant to abide in her love.

And, once again, I had a better idea of what it meant to abide in God’s love.