

Love - God Has Set the Standard

6th Sunday of Easter – Year B

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48
Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

1 John 4:7-10
John 15:9-17

During the moral upheaval of the 1960s the subject of ‘love’ gained particular prominence in the cultural mindset, particularly in comparison with the carnage coming out of Vietnam seen daily on the television, read about in the newspapers and debated strongly in both the social and the political arena. We began to hear and say such slogans as “make ‘love’, not war.” Cultural sages began to sing songs with such themes as “All You Need is ‘love’.”

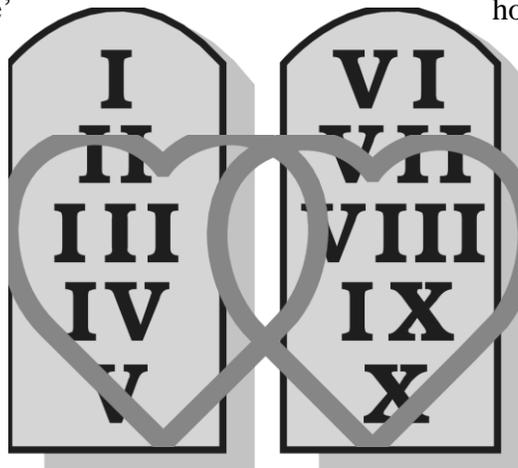
While many of that generation would have us think they were revolutionary, such themes emphasizing ‘love’ were not new to the human, particularly the Christian, mindset. Such has been the constant theme behind the Good News of our salvation, which we celebrate at great length during this fifty-day celebration of Christ’s Resurrection. Given that, would either Jesus or St. John have felt at home during the sixties, with such lackluster, exhaustive, dreary and mind-numbingly avant-garde talk of ‘love’? Or might they have stood out like two sore thumbs amid such jaded monotony?

The understanding of ‘love’ of which both Jesus and John speak is expressed briefly in the basic command to “love one

another” (John 15:17). Jesus expands upon this eloquently in the preceding verses as he addresses the Eleven for the last time before going off to be betrayed – “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Live on in my love” (John 15:9). John develops this concept in his First Letter. He points out that God has set the standard for Love – “not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us,” – and exhorts us to “let us love one another because love is of God” (1 John 4:7).

The Love spoken of by Jesus, however, is different from the popular clichés so prominent in our cultural mindset. In His command to “live in my love” Jesus gives a very specific classification to the Love we are called to live – “You will live in my love *if you keep my commandments*” (John 15:10). Jesus offers as the pinnacle of Love the act of self-sacrifice for a friend, but then attaches the same classification – “You are my friends *if you do what I command you*” (John 15:13-14). Hence, keeping God’s commands is the essential element to the Love we are called to live. Without total obedience to God, call it what we might, it is not Love.

Therefore, on further examination of



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popular slogans regarding ‘love’ that grew out of the moral mayhem of the sixties still lingering in our modern cultural mindset, placed alongside the standard of Love expressed by the very existence and action of God, we might recognize other, more exacting denotations that divulge the true connotation behind popular cultural idioms. “Make ‘love,’ not war” can be more precisely understood to mean, “be promiscuous, not violent.” The Christian understanding of Love, as Jesus taught it, would declare in contrast, “be neither promiscuous, nor violent, but obey God.” The popular refrain, “All You Need is ‘love’” can attain greater exactitude in the Christian context – “All You Need is Obedience to God.”

Such ideas expressing the true nature of Love taught by both Jesus and John may not have been popular during the so-called “Summer of ‘love’,” and during the overall pandemonium of the sixties, a time of rebellion against all things authoritative, when expressions of so-called ‘love’ led to outright violations of the standards given us

by God. Our response to such popular cultural clichés, as followers of Christ, might be to respond with that other question arising from popular culture – “What’s Love Got To Do With It?”

God has set the standard for Love by sacrificing His only Son (1 John 4:9-10).

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Jesus, in turn, further expanded the standard of Love by living and acting, first and foremost, in total obedience to the Father. Finally, Jesus imposed this standard onto His followers

when He commands us to “live on in [His] love.” In short, we are to Love, not by the modern ideology of popular culture, articulated in droning clichés. Rather, Jesus declares, we are to “love one another *as I have loved you*” (John 15:12); a Love lived in total obedience to the commands of God, who is the very embodiment of true and authentic Love.

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