

I AM love

Easter 5C—April 24, 2016

[This transcript was meant for a spoken performance. It is not optimized for a reading experience.]

*I give you a new commandment:
love one another;
just as I have loved you,
you also must love one another."*

—Gospel of John

Will you pray with me? To God, to you, to all be the glory. May we be open to experience the interconnectedness of one to another. Amen. May this be so!

Before we get started, I want to get your coffee orders. Who's first? Think about what coffee you would like before you place your order.

How many take their coffee black? Who takes cream? One packet, or two, or even three sugars. Oh wait, is that brown, white or raw sugar? No, Irene, you don't get to choose your sugar. You get the sugar substitute.

Wait, before you order your coffee, you need to decide what size you want and "the Big Gulp" is not a coffee size—that is a 7-11, brain-freezing drink.

Can you see how complicated this order might be? How many of you are old enough to remember Woolworth's or Kresge's?

Looking at a menu from 1961, you could have bought a cup of coffee for 10 cents. Ten cents would buy you a "delicious coffee". That is what the menu said; that is what they served: a delicious coffee. You would sit yourself down at the lunch counter and the waitress would ask you, "Can I start you off with a coffee?"

Today in 2016, you couldn't go into any shop and say, "I would like a coffee." We live in what some refer to as a coffee culture. The delicious coffee is now promoted with enticing and sophisticated vocabulary.

Will your coffee be a cappuccino, an espresso, a skinny latte, or maybe something seasonal? Sorry, there are no pumpkin-spice coffees right now. You could buy an iced caramel macchiato.

Confused yet? Wait, you are not done placing your order. Back to "What size do you want?" If you are ever feeling impish, go into a Starbucks coffee and tell them you would like a medium coffee. Watch the counter person—I mean the barista—get confused. Starbucks renamed the size of coffee, the size of drinks that you have been drinking since you could drink. Small, Medium

or Large doesn't exist in Starbuckland. You have to be fluent in the language of the corporation: will that be a short, Grande, or Venti? That's not all: you need to know that Venti Hot is smaller than Venti Cold.

Now you realize that taking your order is difficult. You will just have to settle for "delicious coffee" served downstairs.

Although this might sound like a sermon on coffee, this sermon is about change in words and change in understandings of words. There are two examples of changes and expansion of words.

The gospel writers we call John write, *"When Judas had gone, Jesus said, 'Now has the Promised One been glorified, and in this One, God has been glorified.'"*

Glory is defined as high renown or honour won by notable achievements, such as "to fight and die for the glory of one's nation". Glory is also described as something magnificent or of great beauty.

Keep in mind that the gospel you are reading has two intertwined streams of thought. On one level, there is the story of Jesus and those who became the followers. This is the Jewish Stream. The other stream is the story of the community, the Johannine community. This is the emerging Christian Stream.

It is the Christian community that has to wrestle with and understand what is being taught and what is being changed or reimagined. If you read the gospel of Mark and then read the gospel of John, you will see a completely different style of writing. The gospel of John is described as more sophisticated as the writers re-image the idea of Christ, which means the Messiah or the anointed one.

The early followers who actually experienced Jesus had one interpretation of what Messiah meant. Jesus the Christ was to be a warrior king more powerful and more brutal than the entire Roman Empire.

When glorification is written in today's gospel, that glorification comes through execution. When your warrior king is executed, that will rattle you.

The story today has Jesus speaking about his death and connecting his death with the Divine. Jesus's death and Jesus's glorification is in the cross.

Jesus was executed somewhere around the 30th year of the first century. John's gospel emerges in the late first century. All of the followers, early and later, are trying to figure out who Jesus was or even is post-mortem, after his death.

The storyteller presents a pathway of discovery. Hear the words again: they are a foreshadow.

*My friends, I shall not be with you much longer.
You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews,
where I am going, you cannot come.*

*I give you a new commandment:
love one another;*

*just as I have loved you,
you also must love one another.*

The writers are presenting a powerful message and a clear path. “Love one another.” Who is the audience for this reading? Then and back there, the audience was the members of the emerging community of John and even for the earlier followers of Jesus.

The path that is laid out for the listener is a complete change of direction.

Love one another. Love one another, Jesus said to his followers. Love one another, the sacred texts say to us here and now.

If you thought your coffee order was difficult to put in, I am going to now be taking your love order.

Today’s text comes out of a multi-cultural, multi-religious environment. Our religious text was not created in a vacuum. You already know that the first-century Middle-Eastern culture rested in the remnants of Greek philosophy and culture.

The early listeners knew the breadth and depth of the concept of love, just like we understand the complexity of ordering a delicious coffee today.

So let’s get your love orders in. How many of you would like to place an order for erotic love? *Eros* love is named after the Greek god of fertility. *Eros* relates to the idea of sexual passion and desire.

Eros, in the Greek understanding, was not necessarily something positive, as we might think today. *Eros* was viewed as dangerous, fiery and an irrational form of love.

Eros involves the loss of control.

So no orders for *Eros* love this morning?

How many of you would like to order some *Philia* love today? Some of you have lots of *Philia* love. Irene and Audrey exhibit *Philia* love. When Carol talks about going for a tea party with friends she is experiencing *Philia* love.

Philia is considered far more important to the Greeks. *Philia* love is a love of deep friendship. *Philia* describes a deep comradeship. *Philia* is about showing loyalty to your friends, sacrificing for them, as well as sharing your emotions with them.

Some of you have another type of *philia* love which the Greeks called “*Storge*”. *Storge* is the love that a parent has for their children.

You might want to consider it a playful love, a playful Greek love. This love we often get confused with *Eros*.

Ludus is the giddy, flirtations, infatuation love. “He’s so dreamy/she’s so hot” love. *Ludus* is the early stages of relationship and connection.

Ludus love is also experienced if you go to a bar or a party where you are free to banter and laugh with friends and new acquaintances.

If you are looking to expand your circle of friends, you will need to order some *Ludus*.

The early listener would connect the word love with all the above understandings. They would then need to figure out which love is Jesus speaking about.

Maybe Jesus was speaking about *Agape*. Do we have any orders for Agape?

Of all the loves, Agape is the most radical and possibly the most difficult, so you might want to double your order. Agape is a selfless love. That is dangerous. To lose oneself can be dangerous.

You need to stretch your concept of love to know that Agape love is a love that is extended to everyone. I told you this was a radical and difficult love.

Agape is extended to all people: family, friend, community, enemy. Broader still, Agape is the love of all life.

Our world is in critical need of Agape.

The next love you can't order. It's not that we are out of it; *Pragma* love is created from scratch. Pragma emerges over time. Pragma is a long-standing love that one has for another. You will see it in an old married couple. You might have experienced it. You might be experiencing it.

Eros and Ludus are exciting and fiery. Eros and Ludus get our juices flowing. Eros and Ludus are a part of "falling in love."

Pragma is about standing in love. To stand in love takes courage and tenacity. Pragma is about enduring—no, scratch that word—Pragma is about learning to surf on the ebb and flow of a relationship.

You didn't know that you could order so many different types of love. There is one more. Let me say it slowly. The last love the early listener would have known about was *Philautia* (Phil-autia).

Philautia is defined as self-love. Some of you might know the shadow or unhealthy side of self-love. This would be narcissism. Narcissism is the self obsessed with blinders to all others. A narcissist can only see their self. They are caught in seeking their fame and their fortune.

That is the dark side of Philautia. The other side can be better understood from a Buddhist perspective: Philautia is self-compassion.

This is what the early followers understood about love in the first century. This is what we need to understand here and now. Then and there, the followers took on the new commandment. To "love one another" was a command of action. Love is not just a feeling. Love is also an action.

The early communities in the late first century grasped and practised the commandment to love. This was a radical message in the first century. This is how the early church survived. They loved one another.

Slowly, very slowly, they drew their circle wide and wider still. The love they had for one another in community or congregation, they extended to others.

The radical movement, in a way, was never about who Jesus was. The movement, the church, is about who the Christ is—present tense.

I cannot tell you really who Jesus was. Jesus no longer exists. Christ is not an idea, Christ is an experience. If I cannot tell you, then all I have left is to show you.

Let us show one another who the Christ is in our life. The writer adds that *"By love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are Christ's disciples."*

We are called to action. That action is love. You are invited and encouraged to love in many ways and love in many forms because this is good news indeed.