

## This is love. Pass it along.

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year B. Mothers' Day. May 10, 2015. Christ Church, Sheridan MT. (Text: John 15:9–17)

*Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*

It's easy to get confused about love. When we talk about love, we habitually think of the emotion we call "love" —affection for family members (like mom), or romantic attachment to our sweetheart, or friendship for somebody we've known since high school. Emotions just happen. Emotions are more or less reflexes, or hormonal responses. *Emotions* can't be commanded. Nobody can TELL you what to feel. Oh, they can *tell* you. But you can't obey. (Not even mom can dictate your emotions!)

The love that Jesus says is "his commandment" is a form of behavior that we are free to choose or reject. This love that can be commanded is characterized by three things, all of which involve our free choice: (1) commitment, (2) loyalty, and (3) unselfishness. This "chosen love" takes the form of treating the other person the way we'd treat ourselves if we were in their shoes. . . with deliberate patience, generosity, empathy, and kindness. . . . EVEN if the person in question *really* gets on our nerves! (Even if we're mad at them at the moment.)

In order to be people who can choose to love others like this, we must first *be* loved this way. The great biblical example is the love Jesus showed by giving his life for us. —But since it's Mothers' Day, I want to give you a home-style example of what I'm talking about.

It's a tribute to *all* mothers, everywhere, that most people see their MOTHERS as the perfect illustration of the intentional, deliberate, and sacrificial love of Jesus. I've asked church groups this question many times, "Who first showed you the love of Christ?" MOM is invariably the first answer. Sure, we know there are always some bad apples in the human "barrel" of moms. But the majority of people will tell you that the one person who was always faithful to them, stood up for them, looked after them, took care of them, and put their needs *first* was mom.

My wife Joan is not here this morning because she's staying with our grandson, whom we're looking after while his folks are away. So I can tell you about her without making her blush and ask me to be quiet. Joan was a single mom for many years, and she literally laid down her life for her three children. Of course she gave them the natural affection a mother feels for her kids, but—more than that—she *chose to put them first*. She sacrificed for them. When there was a choice between buying something for herself, or doing something just for herself, versus something for them, she always chose for the children. She never missed a ski race or a basketball game or a concert or any other event that was special for one of her children. She poured out her life for them. —And I'm sure there are mothers just like her sitting here in church this morning.

Laying down our life for others doesn't have to include physical death. But it does mean "dying" in other ways: *dying* to our private agenda. Dying to our self-centered plans. Dying to our ego-driven ambitions. Dying to our appetites. And dying to our need to be in control. We have to choose to die to ourselves if we're going to choose to love others.

The harvest of the love Joan gave her children became visible, not just in the love they grew up to show as adults for their Mom (which is beautiful to see), but particularly in the way the three came to love their own children. As an "outside observer," since I am their step-father, I'm able to see how the

selfless love that was passed from mother to child now shapes a third generation. And these young people will someday be parents who understand how to love. Human life is not long enough for us to be able to reciprocate to our moms and dads the love they gave us when we were kids. What we do is *pass that love along* to the next generation and to the world around us.

Even if we had “problem parents” rather than loving parents, we who are gathered here have all received a great love we *CAN* pass along. We have a love to share because Christ loved us, unconditionally and sacrificially. That’s my point this Mothers’ Day.

If we’re touched by a deep awareness of the goodness, loving-kindness, and mercy God has shown us, then we *want* to give that same kind of “chosen love” to the people around us who seem never to have received any of it before. And we love such people indiscriminately. We offer this love even to those who the world would say don’t obviously “deserve” it. We give it to people who aren’t even going to thank us, much less love us back. But, then, if we only love people who will love us back, that’s *NOT* love. It’s just a transaction.

Jesus died for us long before we could demonstrate that we would care about him or about anyone else. Jesus loved us first—just the way our moms (and dads, too) loved us first. Now we have that love to pass along.

God’s love is its own source. Our love is a *response* to God’s love. Here’s a basic principle: “*You can only give away what you’ve been given.*” To give what I call “chosen love” away to others, we must first have received that love. I think most of us here had the human example of a mom who loved us unconditionally. —And ALL of us have the example of the sacrificial love of Jesus, who is asking us to follow where he leads the way.

The 1st Letter of John says, “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

People who decide to pass along the love they’ve received show that they ‘know God.’ Their theology is the best! As for those who refuse to love, no matter how much else they may know, they don’t know God. For *God is love*.

Father Bruce McNab