

# **The Inclusive Community**

**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

**May 17, 2009**

**Homily of Kathy Bailey**

**Love**

**John 15:9-17**

**Heaven and Hell  
Fire and Brimstone  
Sin and Repentance  
Sin and Forgiveness  
Love and Hate**

**As we learn more and more about the nature of our faith we are gradually coming to understand that scripture relates to the thinking of the day. The sincere attempts to communicate a message. A way of relating as men and women struggle to find meaning and solace in the world and their lives.**

**It may be said that you can take the teacher out of the classroom but you can't take the classroom out of the teacher. Therefore, I fall back on what I do each day of the week. First, I must present the objective: As usual I wish to present ideas that will hopefully challenge each of us to think beyond the mundane and explore different perspectives of our faith.**

**As a side note: This, if you remember, has been my continual objective as I have presented my homilies. Each time I wrestle with my ideas, feeling quite inadequate. I do not have the background and training of our clergy. I have not been officially ordained in any religion. If anything, my faith background is quite mottled, pulling from so many sources. Perhaps many that are questionable. How can I be so bold as to stand up here and present such important, exciting material as though I have some great insight to share.**

**As I wrestled with this, this time around, I started listening more intently to messages coming from pastors from many faiths. Some led to insight but others I firmly believe are just plain wrong, perhaps even dangerous. Others clearly contradict all that we are learning. Perhaps the real struggle of religion in this day and age is for all of us to wrestle with the messages that are swirling around us. Why should my message or yours be any different.**

**Each of us approach the pulpit (whether in a church or over coffee with a friend) and present our understanding as it is at that point in time. Yes, we must be responsible for what we say and not lead others in dangerous ways but within the best of our abilities we are called to put on the table our understanding as a way to help ourselves and others**

**explore and grow. Too often we take the message as true or we discard it as worthless. Until we wrestle with the message within our own souls we have wasted valuable opportunities.**

**I suppose this concept came to me as I struggle to understand how to help my students learn. I am most aware that what the student is thinking while someone is explaining, is crucial to the learning. If the student is just taking in the information and trying to remember it, they will not learn. To learn they must be interacting with the ideas, checking them against their own knowledge and understanding. (At times I wish I could put something on their heads that would let me know how they are thinking, or maybe not.) How can we possibly learn and grow without such interaction. Hearing the word, repeating creeds and trying to remember others ideas can only go so far. We are challenged to interact with the ideas for real growth.**

**Now back to the second task I present in school each day, it is what we call a “do now” or problem of the day. Its purpose is to engage the student immediately in the subject matter. To lay the groundwork for the lesson.**

**Today’s theme is “Love” - Your “do now“, is to take a minute and reflect on love. What is it? What does it mean? Do we have a superficial acquaintance with love or do we grasp the depth that makes it worthy of so much emphasis?**

**Please close your eyes a minute and explore your understanding of Love.**

**Ok, now that you have had an opportunity to start thinking of your own message or homily what are some words that came to mind?**

**We all know a lot about love. We know that there are many types of love. We know there are levels of love. We know that love usually feels better than its alternatives. So what can we say about love that will challenge each of us in our faith.**

**I began wondering why love is so emphasized and is not just a given. What parts of love do I shy away from? Do I prefer not to acknowledge?**

**Just what is scripture challenging us to do?**

**Once again I step back to consider the writing of the message. The variety of edicts in scripture; the tone set of a vengeful angry God and a loving forgiving God. Each message was written to recognize different people and different times.**

**Once again I go back to my students. I have attempted many different approaches to convey messages. I’m sure if we were to write all the messages I present through time we would find many seemingly contradictory and some so mundane they are barely worth the time of day. Each message is heard and internalized in different ways by different students. Most are very meaningful to some and infuriating to others.**

**You can each relate to this as you think of the challenges you have faced communicating with your children, spouses, family and friends.**

**Yes, I am beginning to grasp that scripture has been written over time and the myriad of stories passed through the ages were interpreted in ways so people could explore their essence, the meaning of life, and discover ways to survive in a many faceted world.**

**Perhaps there is a need for Fire and Brimstone, heaven and hell. It does appear that some are motivated by fear.**

**Sin and repentance, sin and forgiveness. Such concepts have helped some be “better” people.**

**Love and hate, Love and fear, love and anger, love and indifference. Love appears throughout the bible. Love is foremost in the teachings of Christ. Love is the commandment of all commandments. In today’s scripture we heard “This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”**

**What is Love? What is the message that the early Christians wanted so desperately to convey?**

**Last week I gave a wedding gift including a frame that was inscribed with the scriptural definition of love. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”**

**Love as a matter of fact is choice. Many years ago I was deeply impressed by a story. A women of great faith lived a simple life in a small rural community. She attended church each Sunday dressed in her best dress wishing to honor the Lord by her appearance. One Sunday she invited a new friend to join her for church. She witnessed the friend approaching her house on Sunday morning with her apron on. How upsetting that someone would insult the Lord by wearing an apron to church. Yet, as her friend approached she was struck by a thought. How embarrassed her friend would be, thinking she was properly dressed, to be the only one in church wearing an apron. This startling thought caused her to say “wait a minute. I forgot something.” She disappeared into the house and came out wearing an apron and together they proceeded to church.**

**For some reason this story made a great impression on me. We are frequently faced with situations where we are forced to choose between being “correct” or humbling ourselves to make others know love and acceptance. Many of these choices are not so easy. Welcoming home the prodigal son, helping the injured man beside the road. Speaking out against a wrong even when it jeopardizes our being. Being loyal to the belief that it is more important to do a higher more loving good than be comfortable.**

**As I thought about this message and thought about this congregation I knew that all of you hearing my voice are such good people. You demonstrate your love in a million different ways, surely I am wasting my words.**

**Yet, deep within a little message kept nagging away. The little message kept hinting at little**

memories of times I chose a less loving alternative for a variety of what may have seemed like good reasons. Were they? Perhaps I'll never know for sure but I know they are there. Hopefully none of these decisions were such to cause real harm, yet could they in the future. If I have such experience in my past how could I say they won't happen again? Am I that different from the rest of you? Perhaps you have those nagging messages deep within you. Perhaps you will be challenged again today, this week, this month, whenever. Will you choose the loving way? It's not always easy but always opens the door for understanding and growth.

And that is the objective of our emerging, evolving, loving, creative spirit that we once again invited into our lives at the beginning of this service.