

6th Sunday of Easter + Acts 10 + I John 4:7-10 + Jn 15:9-17

Our brief Gospel today really reveals the heart of Christianity, which we might define as remaining in God's love. So let's look at this in 6 steps. To keep this from becoming too academic, I'll use the image of something that I think is just one little sign of God's love here on earth—think of yourself on a beach somewhere, soaking up the warmth of the sun, with a cool breeze swaying the palm trees, listening to the gentle waves lapping on the shore.

Ok, step 1: the fundamental principle of our faith is, as Jesus says: *as the Father loves me, so I also love you*. In other words, Jesus loves us with the same divine love as He is loved by God the Father! Think of that! But this also means that God is the first actor in reality, and thus in our faith. Everything we believe is based on the fact that God has initiated, He has acted first, in loving us. And as amazing as that is, it is also sadly why I think so few people believe today; because they are seemingly stuck in thinking themselves to be first, to be God, and for this reason demand God (and the Church) to act in ways they “feel like” God should act in any given moment. So the trade-off in believing in God and receiving His love means that you have to de-throne yourself as God, and accept the fact that He made you, willed you into being, and loves you exclusive of anything you have or have not done.

Step 2: it belongs to the very nature of love to be shared, to give itself away. Which means that God wants us to be part of this relationship of love. He doesn't just bestow His love down from above on us, while we live essentially separate lives here on earth. Someone could send you a postcard with a photo of that beautiful beach on the cover and a note saying “wish you were here” on the other side, and that would be a loving thing to do. But Jesus says, *remain*, or “*abide*” in my love. In other words, God catches us up into His Triune love and wants us to “abide” there, so to speak. He invites us into His own inner life, which means the relationship is much more serious, because we are now major actors in this drama of love. Instead of just sending us a “postcard” as a token of His love, it's as if God says to us, “let's hang out on the beach and enjoy the experience together.”

Step 3: Jesus answers the question, *how*? How can we remain in God's love, which, if we are honest, often seems so far above and beyond us? The answer? He says, *If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love*. Another reason why many people do not believe today is that they do not like the “rules” of our faith. But any reasonable person has to admit that love has rules. Using our example, people are free to get drunk and play loud music and act obnoxiously on the beach. But true love would say, “in order for everyone to enjoy the beach together, let's follow a few rules like no glass bottles, or no swimming in the rip tide.” And in time, we begin to see that these rules give us true freedom, and allow us to enjoy the beach even more, because they allow us to *remain* in the joy of the beach.

And that brings us to step 4: Jesus desires us to remain in His love, so that our *joy might be complete*. Talk about a good and loving God! God wants us to be joyful—completely joyful! If I were to define joy, I would say that joy is the end result of all we have said up to this

point: joy is the *abiding* experience knowing that you are perfectly loved. And so like love, joy seeks to be shared. This is also part of joy's internal logic.

So step 5: Jesus says, *This is my commandment: love one another as I love you*. If I remain in God's love, this means His love is at work in me, changing me and making me more like Him. If we all treat each other the way we like to be treated, that beach will be pure joy. And I won't worry that somehow the presence of others will be a threat to my happiness, because we're all friends. Jesus calls us His friends, if we follow His commands. That is, if we choose to abide in His friendship. And this is not just surface level, "facebook friends." This kind of friendship is like that between war buddies. Our friendship with Christ is based on the fact that He laid down His life for us. We are now bonded at the deepest level.

We will now fast forward a little to the last step. Jesus says, *it was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain*. I could never be content all alone on the beach. To experience abiding joy, I want as many people, now my friends in Christ, with me as possible. I think of those who are alone who do not know the joy of being loved by God. I think of those who live in poverty and fear who have never even dreamed of going to the beach. I think of those who don't believe they are loveable, or that joy is possible. The list could go on. God's love makes me desire to have them share in His joy, which is also now my joy.

Now obviously, this beach image pales in comparison to the love of God in Jesus Christ. But what if we shared the joy of the Gospel as readily as we share the joy of our family vacations, our children's sports successes, our hunting trip results, and so on? So let us ask the Lord to help us do just that, to *go and bear fruit that will remain* and so be true friends of God.