

Fifth Sunday of Easter – C – 2022
Acts 14.21-27///Rev. 21.1-5///John 13.31-35

→after giving her catechism class a very thorough lesson on the Ten Commandments....the teacher thought she would quiz her students to see if they were paying attention to the lesson....

→so she asked.... *“What is the First Commandment”*...and called on little Joey who was staring into space

→she knew that he hadn't been paying attention all that much....

→so when asked ... *what is the first commandment*....Joey thought for a moment and answered: *“The First Commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.”*

PAUSE.....

→today we hear about an interesting episode in the Gospel reading about the relationship of the disciples to Jesus.

→it takes place soon after Judas had left them to go to the authorities

→and none of the disciples can quite bring themselves to talk about what is about to happen....

→...they know Judas is missing, yet they still feel his presence among them as Jesus speaks...with the only reminder being the one, solitary **empty chair** at the table....

→the heavy sadness of what is about to happen begins to bind the apostles closer together than ever before.

→and the absence of Judas creates a dark shadow hanging over the whole room.

[in a way] we can feel and sense Christ's sadness....as he speaks

→he speaks to the disciples gathered around him and His tone is that of a person who knows and accepts what will soon happen.

→and so....he gives the disciples a final testament of himself:

“My children, [he says] I will only be with you a little while longer.”

////and so, I give you a new commandment: *“love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples...if you have love for one another”*

→it is not a commandment given.....as though people have not loved one another before.

→indeed....in every age people have loved.

[however].....the power of this commandment *“to love one another”* is the most important element of the entire teaching of Jesus.

PAUSE

The love that Christ speaks of is not the ordinary kind of love about which we usually think.

→[on the contrary]....this love is a type of love that is the “all-encompassing love” from the God who became one of us.

PAUSE

→recall that it was just last week that we heard, “the Father and I are one.”

///and because we are one with Christ, we have a special relationship to the Father.

→[and so] When you think about it...these are encouraging thoughts, but [at the same time] they probably cause some questions for us as well.

→in the post-resurrection preaching about Jesus, the Jews of many different cities and towns slowly came to believe that Jesus had truly been raised by the Father.

→and yet, the preaching of that very early Church, also reminded believers that there would still be many trials on the way to entering the Kingdom of God.

Similarly, we [too] will also, more than likely, experience trials in our own lives as well

→...we will always wonder about why bad things happen to good people.

→why people create bombs to kill innocent people

→why some people destroy the lives of anyone that gets in their way?

→why there seems to be such a constant disregard for human life, the beauty of the earth, and the sacredness of life?

→[and]....No theologian or philosopher will ever adequately answered these questions.

→yet, in the light of the resurrection, and in this season of Easter.... we continue to look for hope and promise....we continue to look for new life and God's presence in us

PAUSE

→there may be some who are caught up in depression – perhaps maybe even the person sitting right next to you.

→there may be some experiencing emotional or physical pain.

→others who are going through a time of doubt or uncertainty in which everything about their life is questioned.

→there are probably some here who are feeling alone, deserted by family and friends.

→and some who may be agonizing over the betrayal of a spouse, family member or friend.

i.o.w.....we all have many **empty chairs** in life, experiences too painful to perhaps discuss, but nonetheless certainly real and true

→and so, today, in the midst of whatever life hands us, we are being asked to look beyond our own lives.

→filled with joys and sorrows.

→blessings and struggles.

→good days and bad.

→and recognize that we are called to offer each other the hope that we are loved by the Lord,...that we have been saved and that we have been glorified by the Jesus Christ.....

→to face the concerns and trials of our lives....knowing that the Lord is with us....to guide us...and love us always....

PAUSE

→it is an offer given to today and every day of our lives that simply says

“Love one another.” even in the midst of all those empty chairs