

Easter 6 A Sermon  
John 14:15-21  
May 14, 2023

*“The Long Goodbye”*  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

*<sup>15</sup>“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask [my God], and [God] will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees . . . nor knows [this one]. You know [the Spirit], because [the Spirit] abides with you, and . . . will be in you.*

*<sup>18</sup>“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my God, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my God, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”*

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When a visit with my family is wrapping up, the goodbye ritual begins. We all hug one another and then we walk out to the car and hug one another again. Then we start the ignition and roll down the window and wave and shout “I love you” and blow kisses as we drive away. And then, as we pass about the third house, we beep the horn in a final farewell. I’ve always thought our goodbye ritual was very...thorough, even long-ish. Not long ago, I learned that I didn’t even know the half of it. As a bowling outing with my partner’s family wrapped up, we returned our shoes and headed to the parking lot to say our goodbyes. I kid you not, a full hour and a half later we finally got into our cars and drove away after security told us we were being too noisy!

I'm guessing all of you know something of the long goodbye. For those who've used Zoom or similar online platforms for work meetings, church gatherings, or family get togethers, I know you've experienced that awkward and long process when everyone says goodbye, smiles, and waves at the camera until the meeting administrator finally clicks "end meeting."

Jesus' disciples knew something of long goodbyes too. In the Gospel According to John, Jesus' farewell discourse lasted a full three chapters! Today, we heard only seven verses and, if you've ever attended a Christian funeral, you've likely heard them before.

Jesus begins this passage declaring that if his disciples love him, they will keep his commandments. In her commentary on this text, Rev. Dr. Jaime Clark-Soles points out that Jesus only gives one commandment in all of John's gospel! She writes that, "Unlike, say, Matthew, nowhere in John does Jesus command us to go the second mile, turn the other cheek, render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. Famously, Jesus gives only a single commandment in John and it occurs in the chapter just before ours: 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' He reiterates this in the chapter just after ours: '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.'"<sup>1</sup>

Love one another. That's it. Could it get any simpler...or more difficult to follow Jesus? He didn't give his friends a laundry list of dos and don'ts. He didn't prescribe a particular formula for orthodox belief or unorthodox heresy. Instead, he simply told them to love one another. That's his commandment. And then he reminds them that loving one another is the same as loving him, and loving him is the same as loving God—even

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<sup>1</sup> Jaime Clark-Soles. "Commentary on John 14:15-21," Workingpreacher.org, April 27, 2008: [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=69](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=69).

being one with God. According to the Jesus of John's gospel, in loving one another, we are actively participating in the very life of God—here and now. In loving one another, we are actively participating in the very life of the divine—here and now. But friends, it's hard.

Parents, you know this! Life seems like an endless cycle of shuttling between hockey games, dance practice, tutoring, home, school, work and travel team away weekends. It's long days and short nights, often thankless work, and you're just so tired! But it's not just parents that have it especially tough in the loving others department. Coworkers, not mine, but I'm sure some of yours, can be endlessly draining, even toxic. Neighbors can be difficult, store clerks can be difficult, fellow travelers on our morning commute can be difficult—and that's really just a start. Not to mention trying to love all of the people we blatantly disagree with!

We all know that it can be difficult to love others. I suspect that if it were easy, Jesus wouldn't have hammered the point quite so hard. I suspect that if it were easy, it wouldn't be the one thing Jesus commanded his followers to do. When Jesus told the disciples to love one another, he wasn't simply referring to the people gathered in that room. Their charge, our charge, is to love *everyone*.

I suspect that sounds like a pretty tall order. We may struggle to love those closest to us. We may struggle to love ourselves. How are we supposed to love *everyone*? Google has plenty of answers to that question if you are hoping for a practical guide to learning to love everyone in 8 easy steps. I wish it were that straight forward. Best-selling author and meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg offers these words that are helpful to me. She writes:

*Loving all others asks us to open our hearts and embrace our shared humanity with people we don't know well (or at all). However, it does not require getting personally involved with everyone we meet. It does not require us to agree with their actions or views—or to confess our love to strangers on the street. It never requires that we*

*sacrifice our principles or cease standing up for what we believe. The primary work is done internally, as we cultivate love and compassion in our own hearts.<sup>2</sup>*

These words are helpful for me to hear and they offer a little perspective, but still no shortcut. The primary work is done internally – in me, in you, in us. Jesus plants the seeds, but we have to cultivate the love, the compassion, and it isn't easy. But we still try. And as we do, and as you do this week, take some comfort in knowing that you're not trying alone. Love is always hard work – ask any mother in the room. If it weren't hard, everyone would be doing it. May it be so with us. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Sharon Salzberg. "Love Everybody," Garrisoninstitute.org, June 6, 2017: <https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/love-everybody/>.