

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

**13 Pentecost**  
**August 29, 2004**  
**Fr. Bill McGinty**

**“Loving God....Serving the King!”**

You may have noticed that the last three or four sermons have been about God. Last week's "You were always on my mind", about Prayer! "God is..?" about finding God and letting him find you! "Like a Bridge..." about finding faith! Today's sermon is about love; and particularly about loving God.

When we were kids Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy were still riding horses. At the same time Doris Day was singing "Que Serra, Serra", in romantic movies and Pat Boone was singing "April love is for the very the very young!"

As boys our response to the word "love" was ugh! Love was what ruined many a good cowboy movie! And sure as "eggs are eggs" as soon as the cowboy was distracted by the girl he'd go and get himself shot in the back! Mo, love did not come high on our priorities.

Of course, that would change, but you couldn't tell us that at the time! For those fan off days there were three constants every English schoolboy hated - love, classical music, and Shakespeare - and a fourth if you cared to throw in Latin.

Well, what about loving God you may ask! Surly, we must have loved God? I'm sure we always said "yes" if an adult asked us! "Do you know that God loves you?" - our teacher would ask! "And we would all chorus yes!" But we didn't really have a clue we just knew God was this guy who threw you into hell if you didn't love him! Why take the chance? I can't remember anyone in third grade standing up and saying - "No! I don't love God, I don't even know him - I love Mary Robinson in fourth grade and I love little Mo Connelly because she's a great tennis player"!

What we really meant was we love our parents, our parents love God, So we have to love God too!

One day a young mother said to her three year old son, as she was bathing him; - "Do you know that God loves you!"

"Yes!" said the little boy! "Do you love him too? Said the Mom.

"No", said little Jimmy! "But why ever not?" said his Mother!

"I need someone with more skin on their face", said Jimmy!

That probably sums up a truth about our earliest concepts of God! The baby Jesus we can love because he's cute and was born in a stable! Jesus the man we love because he was a

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hero and had a great story! But at an early age God is more difficult because we find it hard to put a face to the name!

To see God and to love God demands that we see with new eyes and see in a new way. Maybe it's like looking at one of those pictures composed of thousands of colored dots. Everyone can see the picture but you! Till one day there it is staring back at you - the image you have been seeking all along.

When is it that we first begin to see God in his creation? Is it when we begin to see the cycle of life or perhaps the poetry and beauty of the seasons! Did we marvel at the simplicity of a flower with its fragile elegance.

When confronted by a Lencic in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century St. Francis of Assisi listened as the man told him - "In time man will be the King of the Universe and will be able to do and make anything that God can do!"

St. Francis tossed him a tulip and said: "Make me one of those!" From the smallest insect to the great blue whale of the ocean we are surrounded by the wonder and imagination of God! Do you know that the cheetah of Africa can run at 70 miles per hour. Scottish Salmon can swim three thousand miles across the Atlantic and three years later return to the same Scottish River and the same pool where they were born?

Do you know that the Komodo dragon of Southeast Asia has a tail twice as long as the rest of its body! It can rotate its eyes 180% so it can see behind at the same time as see forward; it can change its skin color to match its background - and it can catch an insect with its tongue from three feet?

Explore nature and you have to marvel at God. And even if you call it evolution or mother nature, God has left his imprint on all of it.

But, it is when we study ourselves that the reflection we see brings us closest to the love of God. For as the zenith of God's creation people are capable of reflecting him with acts of greatness and with sacrifice and with love. As children don't get to experience that but as adults we often do! And each time it speaks to us of the greatness of our God!

The more we respond to God, the more we listen to that inner voice that directs us to his word - the more we focus on the person of Jesus. Jesus the perfect man, the son of God, the savior of the world. Jesus the teacher, the healer, the comforter! Jesus the suffering messiah, the bringer of God's word, the bringer of God's salvation. It is in examining the life and personhood of Jesus that we come face to face with true love and with the love of God.

For us Christians Jesus simply is our reason for being and our true King! We feel at home with that title as a title of Jesus because it contains so much about how we feel about him.

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It is a title that is deserved because Christ sacrificed himself in an epic battle against evil on our behalf. It proclaims Jesus' victory over death and it speaks to us of service and duty of pledges and honor of sovereignty and allegiance.

It is not a title that we Americans care to give to anybody else! In American history we had enough of Kings! But for Jesus, we can make an exception, for his Kingdom is not of this earth, he tells us! His Kingdom has to do with fellowship, forgiveness, love and mercy - to a man, who epitomizes all of those qualities, we would bow our knee and acknowledge him as our "King!"

But more we would want to follow in his footsteps and serve as he served, sacrifice as he sacrificed. Bring love and healing as he brought love and healing. This is Gospel language: "If anyone would follow me let him take up his cross...who is greater he who sits at table? Or he who serves? And if you would be my follower you must be the servant of all."

All of us are called through our baptism to respond to Jesus' command in some way!

Throughout Christian history there have always been groups who have felt the need to respond to that command in a more pragmatic, a more assertive, a more intimate and a more literal way! In recent years that has included our own Episcopal "Daughters of the King." In that circle of sisterhood, fellowship, and strength they have drawn on the unity, commitment and loyalty to do two things - bring honor to our Christ as King in fulfilling his word; and by seeking to deepen, and enrich their own spirituality as individuals through their unity as a chapter. In doing so, their prayer, healing, and service, serves to build up the Body of Christ and our church at a local and Diocesan level. If Jesus' life can be described as an exercise in love, a journey back to his father, a completion of God's loving salvation; their the Daughters of the King is an attempt to share in that journey by making prayer service and healing a real part of our working week! I suppose we all try to love God in this way! But as you all know from last week's sermon, it is tough! When do we get the time? How can we fit prayer in? We live lives of organized chaos. Our daughters attempt to find strength in a group response that is mutually supportive. Today we honor them and thank them for their generosity of spirit and in the many ways they have enriched us.

Today's second reading speaks of mutual love; hospitality to strangers; visiting those in prison; marriage, honor, faith, and leadership. It ends with the words: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and forever."

Jesus is indeed the constant in our lives Jesus tell us:

"No one has seen the Father except he who has descended from the Father, the Son of Man!"

And again, he tells his disciples:

"If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. The Father and I are one."

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It is our love for Jesus that today expresses our love for God and for God as Father. Somehow we know that in the mystery of trinity they are linked. Just as loving the child seems to bring happiness to a parent; so our love of his Son seems to be accepted as worship and honor to the Father!

God indeed has a face and for us that face is Jesus! Men and women have died for that love! You, my friend have chosen to live for that love!

Today, Jesus' life, his death fill us with pride. Because somehow that pure act of love touched heaven itself and somehow we are connected with Jesus and that has lifted a mere human existence to a new level.

Now in response to the question: "do you love God?" Our answer can only be: "Oh yes I do!" St. Paul in his writings makes this connection between the God we cannot see who deserves our love, and Christ who we can see who suffered and died and won for us so great a victory that is our salvation.

"The whole of Creation", Paul tells us, "has waited for the moment when God would reveal himself - and make us his sons and daughters." All we need is to say 'yes' to God through acceptance of his Son Jesus Christ as our personal savior! Say yes to God and our lives change because we are empowered by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All we have been searching for, all our mere human efforts have tried to achieve, can be achieved by the Spirit.

"Nothing can separate us from the love of God that flows from the Spirit." Today we honor Christ as our King who won us Grace upon Grace.

Let us pray:

Lord our simple minds can not fathom the complexities of you as God.

But we can love you in the beauty of your creation.

We can worship you in the life, teaching and ministry of your Son.

And we can share your life through the Spirit you give us as gift. Let Jesus our lord and savior polish the imperfections of what we offer you! Perfect the words we try to pray to you! Heal the wounds we have as your body here on earth!

This we ask in the name of Jesus our lord and King.

Amen +

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