

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Cycle B

1John 3:18-24 and John 15:1-8

1Jn 3:18 tells us, "Children, let us love not in word or speech but in action and truth." We may think the action part is easy: show we love someone by our actions, not just by talking about it. This line of thinking may take us comfortably to how we love our family and friends. We may bring to mind the ways we have grown kinder as a society. Women could not vote one hundred years ago and now they can be doctors and governors, CEO's and college presidents. Many white folks are much more aware of racism than they were a year ago and a jury actually convicted Derek Chauvin of murdering George Floyd. Being gay in America no longer gets you arrested; most of us accept our LGBTQ family members.

And yet what are really doing about these things? In the same hour the jury convicted Derek Chauvin, police shot and killed sixteen year-old Ma'Khia Bryant in Columbus, Ohio. The disproportionate use of violence by law enforcement with persons of color remains a terrifying fact of daily life for Blacks and Browns in America. Imagine having to fear simply walking around your neighborhood. Yet, while the Catholic parishes I am involved with have offered a great deal of sympathy for parishioners dealing with the pandemic, none has even mentioned racism this year. Last week, I met two people from different parts of America who had been expelled from their Christian parishes for starting gay/lesbian support groups. Last weekend was "Good Shepherd Sunday" and we were asked to pray for priestly vocations to meet the priest shortage. There was no acknowledgement of the underlying cause: Catholic leadership has excluded so many people that there is no one willing or able to answer the call. And yet the leaders are surprised that the branch has fallen from the vine and is withering.

We often forget about the "truth" in that exhortation of 1Jn 3:18, "Let us love in action *and truth*." Love must encompass the clarity of truth. Love names injustice and dismantles it. Love uncovers the path of life and invites everyone to walk on it. 1John tucks this in a line so mild we may miss it: "God's commandment is this: we should believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us." It will not surprise my regular listeners that the "love" in that sentence is the word *agape* or respect for the well-being and dignity of another. Anywhere we humans are not upholding the well-being and dignity of another needs the klieg light of truth shone on it. Whose job is that to do? It is our job, my friends. Instead, we all too often mistakenly act as if peace is weak, forgiveness is tolerating wrong and mercy is passive.

We can also mistake Jesus' metaphor of the vine and the branches as easy. Remaining in Jesus and Jesus in us sounds effortless. Who would want to disconnect from Jesus without whom we can do nothing? In reality, we are disconnecting ourselves all the time. Why else do you think Jesus repeats this phrase "remain in me and I in you" over and over? The Greek verb *meno*, means to abide somewhere. We need to build our home, hang out, live, rest, reside in Jesus. No second home for us in power, fear, resentment or wealth.

On June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof shot twelve Black people and killed nine of them during the Bible study he was attending at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC. According to [Wikipedia](#), "Roof espoused racial hatred in both a website manifesto published before the shooting, and a journal written from jail afterward. Roof posted photos on his website with emblems associated with white supremacy and with the Confederate battle flag." How does one love in the face of such evil? [Bree Newsome](#) climbed a thirty-foot flagpole outside of the South Carolina state house to remove the Confederate flag. She was arrested upon her descent. The resulting publicity prompted the legislature to take the flag down officially on July 10. Bree Newsome peacefully but determinedly said with her actions, "It is time for the government to stop encouraging racial hatred by honoring this flag." Six years later, there is still plenty of injustice to name and replace with the fruit of the Vine of Jesus. Let us pray today to remain in Jesus and love in action and truth.

- ❖ Name the "second home" you go to when you disconnect yourself from Jesus.
- ❖ What is an injustice you need to call out? How can you do that in a loving way?

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