
Beloved, Let Us Love One Another

A sermon by Dean Sam Candler

Easter 5 – Year B

Text based on audio transcription.

“Beloved, let us love one another.” 1 John 4:7

When I read the First Epistle of John, from which we heard our epistle lesson this morning, and when I hear the word “beloved” and the phrase “little children” throughout the epistle, and when the writer addresses his readers as “little children, little children, little children,” --- well, I think of a particular wall in my house. I hope many of you have seen it.

In whatever house my wife Boog and I live, we always create what we call a strong wall. And on that one wall, often in the kitchen, we cram it full of every family photograph we can find. There is no way to tell what the original color of the wall is. There’s no design to the photographs. We have ancestors old and new. We have immediate family members at quite young ages and at older ages. I think John Lennon is up at the wall somewhere. All of our ancestors are on the strong wall.

When I hear the phrase “little children,” I suggest a meditation technique for myself and for any of you. On that wall, there is a particular photograph of four little boys sitting on a fence out in the country. The boys don’t have shirts on. They are slouching over the fence. One of them is me. I have no idea who that person is!

But I do remember those early friends. And I remember how, when they left town to go to these exotic places, moving away, I learned something about geography. One moved to Thomasville, Georgia. One moved to Arizona. I had never heard of Arizona. One is now making paddles in North Carolina. And I’m standing up in front of a bunch of people in Atlanta.

But at five years old, nobody knew what any of those young boys would be doing a year from then, five, ten, fifty years from then. And yet, in that photograph, is the nugget of what those children would become.

The meditation technique I suggest is on this day, or any spiritual day, find an old photograph of yourself when you were somewhat younger. Maybe yesterday. But maybe a long time ago. And imagine, consider what God has done in your life since the time of that photograph. That in that small child, God has worked through brothers and sisters, parents, grandparents, people who have raised you to create who you are now and who you become as baptized children of God, confirmed children of God, leaders of children of God.

Many of you today might take photographs that will never be seen again unless you put them on strong walls or take them out in moments of prayer and imagine what God might be doing in that little child, even then, and daily growing that child to fullness—the fullness of love.

And so, with an eye toward little children, and with my own imagining of myself as a little child I want us to sing a special song this morning. I have already apologized to the choir. I will sing you a song. In fact, it’s more like a ditty than a song and I’m going to sing it several times, until you are singing with me.

It’s actually taken from the Bible. Here’s how it goes:

*Beloved, let us love one another,
For love is of God,
and everyone who loveth
is born of God, and knoweth God.
He that loveth not knoweth not God,
for God is love.
So beloved, let us love one another.
First John, four: seven and eight.*

This is how Episcopalians learn scripture! First John, four: seven and eight. You're welcome to join in!

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You're very good! You're singing better than the 8:45 congregation did!

"Little children" is what the writer to First John said over and over again. "Little children, love one another, for love is of God." (Even though he spoke in the King James Version, the translation still makes sense! "Love one another.")

The writer goes on say, "Perfect love casts out all fear. Perfect love casts out all fear." We gather in church. We gather to baptize. We gather to confirm. We gather to share Eucharist, in order to share perfect love. None of us is perfected, yet we are little children. But when we share that secret ingredient of First John, that secret ingredient of love, then we are on our way daily to the finished product, on our way to perfected love. Perfected love.

We give thanks for those being baptized today for all the photographs of children and ourselves that we share with one another. In those images is a seed of love, planted by our families, those who raised us and growing on us into perfection.

We're gonna sing the song one more time! Join with me!

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Amen.

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