

Easter 6—Year B  
Acts 10:44-48  
Psalm 98  
I John 5:1-6  
John 15:9-17

Everything is in *flux*. Everything is in *motion*. Everything is *changing, all the time*. Today is the **Sixth Sunday of Easter**, and that means that *this coming Thursday* is **Ascension Day**, and that means that the **Jesus** we just got *back in resurrection life* is getting ready to *go away again*. No sooner had we *adjusted* to his **death** *than the women came* with the news, “**He is risen!**” And no sooner had we *adjusted* to **him busting through locked doors** and **appearing alongside us** as we tried to make sense of it all and **meeting us on the daggone seashore for breakfast** *than we have to prepare to let him go again*. And so *today*, we circle back to **the night before that first big letting go—Jesus’ last words to his disciples as they gathered in the upper room**. There will be **the meal**, and that really uncomfortable **footwashing**, and then **Jesus** will launch into **everything he needs to say to them, everything that he needs to convey to them, everything that they will need to keep going in their journey**. *He’s short on time; he’s got to distill it.*

*He’s done three years of solid teaching—he’s covered so much ground*. He’s *preached* about **bringing good news to the poor and the oppressed**. He’s consistently *brought the outsider in*, and *pushed the insider* to see how their **power, prestige, wealth and position** actually **keeps them out**. He’s *crossed* every conceivable **boundary** and *taught his disciples to go and do likewise*. He’s *cautioned against living* a life **fueled by adrenalin and rage and self-righteousness** and *pointed the way to the freedom* that comes in **forgiving** and that **true forgiveness doesn’t sweep wrongs under the rug but deals with those wrongs** in the light of day. He’s *taught* the crazy ways of **nonviolence** in a world that **only knew an eye for an eye**. He’s *healed* those who could find no healing in **heart, body, mind, and soul**. And he’s *challenged* more than a few to **pick up their mat and walk**—helping them to see *their strength and their wholeness and their humanity* and that *they are so much more than their illness and ailment*. *So much ground he has covered*, so much he has *taught his beloved disciples* by **word and deed and example** and the **sheer power of his presence and being**. *How to distill it?* It’s *going to get crazy* in real short order—*either* by his **death** *OR* by his **ascending to the heart of God leaving us waiting** on that **Pentecost Spirit**—*it’s going to get rough*—and *Jesus knows that even better than we*. You can just hear **Jesus thinking**: “*What’s the one thing that I can give them that they can hold onto for dear life? What’s the one thing that I need them to remember? When it’s all said and done, what’s the one thing, the one essential thing they’ve got to know and live and practice?*”

And then **Jesus** looked around that room, took a **deep breath**, and with a big, “**Okay, here it goes,**” let these words pour out of his heart:

*“Friends, it’s all about love. It’s all about knowing you’re beloved. That’s how God has loved me; that’s how I’ve loved you. You live in that love; you dwell in that love; you abide in that love; that deep, deep love is your home. All my commandments, they all boil down to one more way to manifest love. They arise out of love; they return to love. And remember that “commandment” is just another way of talking about practice; commandments are ways of practicing love in the concrete, nitty, gritty stuff of real life in the real and very messy world. So, all these things you’re to do, they grow out of the soil of love and they take you deeper and deeper into love. Even the hard commandments, even the hard practices, they, too, are rooted and grounded in love. And hard as it is, living from this ethic and practice and reality of love with all your heart and mind and soul and body—this is pure joy. This is how you discover the joy*

*that has been mine, and that same fierce joy is yours—this is the way you discover that deep joy that is filled to the full.*

*“Dear friends, do you get that? I’m not calling you disciples; I’m not calling you servants; I’m calling you friends because I’m handing you everything I’ve come to know from living as God’s beloved; every sweet whisper of God in my ear, I’m making known to you. I’m not holding back a thing. No power plays, no playing coy, no clinging to a special status reserved just for me—no, I’m giving it all to you. Friends, beloved friends, you love one another just as I have loved you. You lay down your life for one another, not out of duty or obligation or blood relations or any other order of relationship, but because love calls you to—just like I will do, just like your friend Art did all the days of his life.*

*“Remember friends, you didn’t choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you, I set you in place—wherever you go, you are there with purpose; you are there to bear fruit, the fruit that will last—you are there to love, and sometimes that love will be so exacting, so demanding, so fierce, so complete that it can only be described as “laying down your life.””*

*“I’m just telling it straight so that when it gets rough, and it will, you’ll remember that you will find your way in loving one another.”*

*Dear friends in Christ, it’s so simple. It’s so very, very simple, and yet we have to work it out every minute of every day, every step of the way. Is this **word** rooted and grounded in love, OR is it pushing us farther apart? Is this **action** arising from and surrendered to love, OR is it being driven from some other motivation that serves to keep us and our ego firmly in control? There is no magic formula to this, but only constant, ongoing, attentive *discernment* **breath** by **breath**, **word** by **word**, **action** by **action**. Over time, you begin to get the *tenor* of it, you start to know the *shape* of it, you come to know the *feel* of it. And we learn more and more how to **live in this way of love** by watching how others do it. *That’s why Jesus tells us over and over that we work this out by loving one another. We cannot do it alone. We have to be in community.**

So, in the *heat of the moment* when the world spins out of control, and you feel like you’re **losing your life** (an experience that Jesus describes more than once), in that moment when you **can’t remember anything that you’ve learned from Jesus** as his disciple, **fall back into his love**. **Abide** in his love, **rest** there,  **dwell** there,  **breathe** that love in,  **drink it** into every last part of your being,  **turn to another beloved** in your life and  **draw on the web of love that Jesus has woven around you**, and THEN,  **step forward in confidence and courage, trusting** that, *even if you misstep, love is going before you and behind; love is the home from which you go, and the home that awaits you still, and love will be holding you and guiding you every step in-between.* Amen.

The Rev. Cynthia K. R. Banks  
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Boone, NC  
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