

# Trinity Church (ELCA)

Stephens City, Virginia

## Sunday's Sermon

April 24, 2016

The Rev. Mr. Cameron P. Keyser

Easter 5-C

Back in the “dark ages” – when you could still understand the words to the music on the radio – Nat King Cole did a song – the words of which I thought appropriate for today’s Gospel: about both how *God* sees us, and how – it would be nice – if we saw *others*.

The words are simple; the thoughts, profound:

*“L is for the way you look at me...*

*O is for the only one I see...*

*V is very, very extraordinary –*

*E is even more than anyone that you adore.*

*And LOVE is all that I can give to you – LOVE is more than just a game for two.*

*Two in love can make it: take my heart and please don't break it - LOVE was made for me and you.*

And, indeed, is was: for me and you, and...God. But, the problem *I* have – and, maybe you do, too, sometimes - is just like how the *Peanuts* cartoon put it once: Lucy stands with her arms folded, frowning and determined. Charlie Brown pleads with her: "Lucy," he says, "you *gotta'* be more loving. The world *needs* love. Make this world a better place, Lucy, by loving someone else."

Lucy whirls around angrily and Charlie goes flipping over backwards. "Look, you blockhead," Lucy screams: "The *world*, I love. It's *people* I can't stand!"

The *good* news – for Lucy *and* for us – is that Jesus doesn't call us to *like* one another – because he knew - as Billy Cureton sings: "*God is great; beer is good, and people are craazy!*"

It'd be nice...but to “like” or “not like” is an emotion - and emotions don't respond to commands – even ones from Jesus! The love Jesus commands is not an emotion - any more than is “hate.” We *choose* to hate, just as we choose to love. But, some want to believe that *neither* is a choice – that they're both a feeling: those are the people who love the *idea* of love, but never seem to be able to stay *in* it.

Love is *not* just a feeling – an emotion. Oh, it may start out that way...which is a good thing...but, the longer you live in it, the more you realize that it's a *choice*: a conscious way of acting toward one another that says,

"No matter what, I want good for you, and I will do whatever I can to make sure that you get it."

It's the kind of love that keeps marriages together, and community in-tact. It's not something Jesus wants us to *feel* for each other, but - rather - something he wants us to *do* for one another, knowing that most of the choices we make in life are not between what's trivial and what's important. They're usually between what is important and what is more important. This morning's Gospel reading shows us what's ultimately important: our love in *action* - the kind of thing about which Pierre Teilhard de Chardin – a French philosopher and roman catholic theologian in the early 1950s – wrote, "Sometime: after we master the winds and the waves and the tides; after we master the sun and the sea and the laws of gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And when we do, for the second time in human history, we shall discover fire."

Many – *most?* - of us have been on a diet – but, maybe we've never noticed the theology to be found in the constant "battle of the bulge:" at the very least, it proves that there is a heaven...because there is no justice in this world. "Why should someone as wonderful as *me*," I ask "have to constantly worry about what he eats when so many killers and rapists can eat anything they want and never gain an ounce? *Because there is no justice in the world!*"

That's humorous, but also very true: "it's one reason we come here every week to worship - needing to hear God's *good* news of victory in the midst of all around us that's so bad and defeated...to hear once more the story of the Resurrection and its affirmation that life doesn't end with death. We need to hear again that – somehow - God remains in charge if this world – despite all the evidence – and doubts - to the contrary.

Cynics call it "pie in the sky" – and, who knows? Maybe it is...none of us know - for sure...but, we need to hear it: to imagine this 'Fairy tale of all Fairy tales' to be real - wrapped in the assurance our faith provides.

In today's text from revelation: a book Lutherans often treat like it's infected with Ebola...or, at least with enough “creepiness” and “improbability” as to be

avoided at all costs, John has a 'vision:' a vision of ultimate Divine Love. As sure as John was that the world was bad, he was equally sure that it could - and would - be made good: "a new heaven and a new earth — unstained by sin — a "new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride to replace the Holy City which the Romans had made so ugly in its destruction just a generation before John wrote.

He heard a great voice affirming that God would *always* be close at hand — that we're *not* forgotten in our agony — a place where there would be no more tears, no more death, no more crying or pain. Everything evil would be gone. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, John's vision was that God ultimately would be victorious because 'God had already completed the repairs.'

How hard that must have been for him to consistently believe...how hard it is for us. And, what about all those others in the world: the victims of crime, children in our slums, babies in bombed-out cities, the starving orphans of genocide? For them — and for what appears to be a growing number of others - our celebration of Easter probably seems a cruel deception. To them — and, if we're really honest, for us as well, the

*real* world is usually *not* like 'Easter' but more like Good Friday: with its bloodstains of injury, nail prints of disease...like Calvary where hope is hung, and the tomb: where broken dreams are buried.

But, with eyes of faith, John could see the "pie in the sky," and gave us the revelation that *God's Love wins*— that Easter is God's pledge that those miserable Black Fridays *will* turn into glorious, joy-filled Sundays...the revelation that God's Creation doesn't end with the whimper of a starving child or the blast of a nuclear bomb - it ends with the destruction of the very real and present 'rulers of darkness;' it ends with "justice rolling down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." It ends with the Lamb upon the throne and the victorious song of a massive choir echoing through the universe: "*Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son. Endless is the victory thou o'er death hath won.*"

Improbable? Maybe. 'Pie in the sky? Absolutely - to most. But, an emotion?...hardly. In faith, we see it as God's ultimate vision of the command we're given today: to 'love one another:' as a foretaste of God's Great Feast to come. Amen

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**The final 2/3rds of this message is based on the thoughts and themes of the above two Sources**

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