

**Sermon Notes – May 5, 2024**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. John 15: 9-17**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Love One Another!”**

Baptism is the great equalizer. Peter asserts this in the reading from Acts. He is faced with complaints -- those who have seen that people they hadn't expected to be blessed by the Holy Spirit did in fact clearly show signs of faith. They spoke in languages they had not known! They praised God! But how could they? They were not the “right kind of people.”

Peter leaps into the controversy swirling among the “circumcised believers” (Acts 10: 45) who cannot grasp that “those people” could become welcome in their midst. Peter's argument goes immediately to a liturgical rite (notice that Peter offers a sacramental gift rather than a doctrinal assertion or logical argument) by putting the onus on the “astounded” (v. 45) people to answer why baptism ought to be withheld from those who have received the Holy Spirit. Of course we don't hear a reason from these people because there is no good answer to a rhetorical question. What could they say? The Holy Spirit is of God, and God doesn't make mistakes.

The gospel reading's insistence on this day is Jesus' command to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 15: 12). Jesus has loved His followers in the same way the Father has loved Him. In John's gospel this speech follows the moment in the last supper when Judas leaves the room. Faced with the remaining disciples, Jesus explains what abiding with Him will look like. Abiding and loving are tightly interwoven. The crux of love is that it extends to all for whom Jesus has laid down His life. This at least includes all the baptized. And among the baptized are those who may not be readily understood as people who “deserve” to be loved.

Jesus knows that we do not naturally love one another, so we must be commanded to learn to love because God first loved us.

Obedience to the command to love is impossible by “the Spirit of truth” (John 15: 26) who lives in the church. Those who are siblings in Christ, our fellow travelers on the path of faith, are meant to be wildly divergent so the very body of Christ schools us in how to accept those from whom we differ. Because the Holy Spirit brings us together through the baptismal font, as a church we become a repository of spiritual discernment. When we love one another, God is present as that very love. God is an event of loving! Amen!