

John 15:9-17  
Easter 6, Year B

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LOVE IS DANGEROUS  
[written in oral format]

{As you know, today is mother's day. Therefore, if you have, or ever had....or wish you had a mother, then please rise.

To our mothers..[applaud]. Wonderful. you may sit now}

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Today's text from John 15 is very familiar to most of us. It is a rich, intimate, compassionate passage. The encouraging words exhort us to find complete JOY that comes from abiding in God's love.

You also likely know that there are different words for love in the New Testament. The Greek word used in the text is agape, which is the highest and purest love. It is divine love.

Agape love radiates passion, devotion and grace outwards. It is a complete expression for the other,...for others. This love asks and expects nothing in return, but the wellbeing, peace and wholeness of the other person or people.

Jesus gave the example of laying your life down for another.

This Love is God's love--an outpouring of self for others.

When we love one another (all people) with this kind of love, then as Jesus noted, we will be in realm of God.... and will sense complete joy.

\*However, in this passage, Jesus did NOT warn us that love is dangerous.

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We are keenly aware that engaging in the lesser levels of love can be risky.

We may not get what we desire in return or we may be rejected. Romantic and companionship love can all have a degree of risk.

Yet, agape love / the love Jesus is commanding us to possess and live is dangerous. It will more than likely expose us to harm, injury or peril.

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I discovered the truth of this passage, quite by accident many years ago.

I had just started my first year at Ohio University.

To understand the context, you need to know the following:

I was a naive, middle class teen, reared in the church. I cut my teeth on the back of a pew.

Also, I was raised in a multi-cultured neighbourhood in Toronto. I was in the minority, and I was not trained to be suspicious of people with dark skin.

I was aware of racial prejudice. I knew about segregation and the Jim Crow laws, and I had watched the racial riots on the news.

However, I didn't have firsthand experience..... until I moved into my dorm room.

Right next door to me lived George--George Dixon.

George was very large,....and he had a very dark complexion. In those days, one would call him black.

He was from the inner city of Cleveland,...from a very different culture than mine. George was starting his third year, and he had a job as a bouncer at pub in the town. And,.... he was a member of Delta Phi Delta-- a militant Black fraternity with ties to the Black Panthers. Again remember, things were different back then. Blacks were actively protesting and rioting against injustices and bigotry.

>Okay,..... maybe things haven't changed that much<

To be sure, there was a lot of racial tension in the air.

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When I first saw George, I said, "Hi", and he just mumble something and went on by....

A couple of days later, when I got back from a class I noticed three or four people with the same fraternity jacket as George's waiting in front of George's door. I walked up to them to say "Hi", and I was greeted with some lighthearted bantering. I joked back, and that lead to some macho talk,.... which lead to me sharing that I'd taken judo classes. Still,... all was fine, and they even wanted a demonstration.

So, I wisely grabbed the arm of the smallest one. He was smaller than me, which gives you an idea of his size. I easily flipped him.... ..unaware that George was walking down the hall.

I should not have done that to one of George's frat brothers. George quickly came up to me, and commenced tossing me about.

I wasn't a Mennonite then, but I had an Anabaptist moment, and did Not resist. Besides,.... it would have been pointless.

It wasn't a pretty scene. George ended up sitting on my back with my chest pressed against my legs. I was folded in two. It wasn't a pleasant position as he continued his onslaught.

Within seconds, I yelled out in the appropriate middle class fashion, "I Give UP", I Give Up."

He laughed and replied, "What's this 'I give up'...white boy? This ain't the suburbs."

Needless to say, I was greatly disappointed that he didn't abide by my rules. I Was shocked and dismayed.

Before my back snapped, the others in the area had mercy on me, and pulled George off of me.

As he left, George turned and warned me, "Keep away from me and the Brothers.....or you'll be sorry."

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For the first time in my life, I had a real and very menacing enemy, who openly declared to be my enemy.

That was beyond my scope of possibilities. In my comfort zone / in the church domain,.... no one EVER openly admitted to being an enemy.

..... So, then and there,....as George walked away..... I decided to make George my friend.

During the next few weeks, whenever I'd see George, I'd say, "Hi George. I want to be your friend." I think my overtures of friendship agitated and enraged George even more.

He would always reply with a litany of 4 letter words and more threats of physical harm.

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These strange encounters repeated a number of times, but before long, George started to respond with "What are you NUTS. Keep away from me." And, his behaviour became even more intimidating.

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I'd react by smiling and saying, "That's not being friendly", even though I was becoming increasingly nervous.

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One evening, I was playing pool in the Rec. centre. I was leaning over the table, sizing my shot,... when.....WACK.....PAIN.

George had snuck up behind me and busted a pool stick on my back by swinging it as axe.

Loving an enemy can be Dangerous!!

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A week later, I finally had an ideal opportunity. It was a private moment with George,.....and he was trapped.

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It was in the afternoon. I walked into the dorm's multi-stall washroom,.....and low and behold, George was the only one there, AND... it was a humble moment for him. He was in one of the stalls. I stood outside his stall door, and said, "George, I want to be your friend, and I'm not leaving until you agree to be my friend."

He became furious,...using Lots of Nasty words as he vividly described his intentions.

While standing by his door, I repeated my petition three or four more times, which prompted similar vile replies.

Then,.....I think.....something happened. George was truly moved!

(Pardon the pun). He had an ontological movement.

I bet....no one else had ever tried So Hard to be his friend.

In a calmer, softer voice he asked, "Why you want to be my friend?"

I answered honestly, saying, "I don't know? But, you're my neighbour, and I've always been taught that I am to love my neighbour,.....and I want to be friends NOT enemies."

Either, I touched his heart or he couldn't hold it any longer, regardless, George said, "OK,.... I'll be your friend,... NOW Leave."

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George and I became great friends,... and it was great to have a BIG friend .....who's a bouncer at a.... Oh, I better not say that.

He was a faithful friend, too, even though his Frat brothers gave him a hard time for associating with me.

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This story is Not about any virtue of mine; I was mostly naive.

Nevertheless, I did learn a number of things from this experience.

One, the way of befriending an enemy can work. The way of peace can be dangerous, and it may not always work, BUT it can work!

Choosing violence and brute force never creates a friend, and rarely attains it's rationalization. Plus, violence and brute force always produces more destruction. The way of peace can work. Enemies can become friends.

The second lesson is how very important it is to teach and model the lessons of Christ to our children. I responded to George in the manner in which I was taught. I was taught to love enemies, and I believed that lesson. I simply applied what I was told to be true.

The third lesson from my encounter with George is the lesson that Jesus presented in our text. Without really thinking about it, I did Jesus' commandment of love.

During George's rage against me, did I have warm, fuzzy and compassionate thoughts for George. NO, Not at all.

Did I possess agape love....., I didn't know it at the time, but YES!

I did have agape love.

Jesus said (paraphrasing), If you keep my commandment of demonstrating love to all, then you will abide in God's love.

Love is much more than a feeling. Love is a choice; it is a lifestyle and a way of being.

Regardless if we have fond feelings for our enemies, if we do kindness, walk humbly, do justice and seek healing then we are abiding in God's love. Our faith in the way of Christ / our actions to serve God, even against our basic instinct...is a wonderful act of love.

In fact, it is laying down our own lives.....for a higher calling / for a higher purpose.....and for the sake of healing and befriending what is broken. Doing that is divine! And, that agape love grows.

I didn't know it back then, but thanks to good instructions and out pouring of God's Spirit,....encouraging me to continue.... I was abiding in God's love.....And, in the end,.... there was great joy.

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Still, Love IS Dangerous. Agape Love / God's love applied,... will likely turn our world upside down. It powerfully transforming.

Especially,.....if we were to allow ourselves to be at the receiving end of love.

There are times, when we are actually the enemy,.... when God and God through others are trying to reach us.

Indeed,.....and there are times when we are our own worst enemy.

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If we could only come to the realization that God is trying to harmonize with us / that God is pouring  
God's self out for us... ....for the world

If we could only grasp that, and I wonder what that would look like?

I wonder who that would look like?

Maybe Christ?

Or maybe a large black man from inner city Cleveland?

And, I thought I was changing George, but actually I changed the most.

Amazing..... Love is dangerous,.....and amazing.