



**TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
NOVEMBER 15, 2020  
JOHN 15: 12-17  
“GRACE, GRATITUDE, AND GENEROSITY”**

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.”

**SERMON**

Love each other as I have loved you.

That’s a pretty amazing proposal.

Love one another as I have loved you....

So how does God love us?

Luther says that if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus.

If we accept this statement, we no longer have to guess about the nature of God, do we?

But the ego likes to play games, as if the ego’s opinion means something. Opinions are like noses, everyone has one.

Well, we need to get over ourselves.

Some of the best minds over the centuries have struggled with understanding the nature of God. Why do we think we have something worthwhile to contribute?

If we didn’t have much experience with cars, we would look like a fool if we acted like we did.

And if we didn’t know anything about cooking, we wouldn’t risk saying, “I’ll be glad to fix thanksgiving dinner.”

And if we didn’t have some expertise as a musician, we wouldn’t volunteer to play with this band.



It's only when the ego stops acting like it knows, do we have a chance of experiencing the holy....

So how does God loves us?

I am a Jesus guy. Not that big of a church guy or an institution man, except that it gives us a place to talk about Jesus. At least once a week. And I get paid to read and think and pray and write about Jesus.

And I'm also a psychology guy. Theology is the study of God and psychology is the study of the soul, so they make excellent partners when we consider about a spiritual life.

I'm not real big on the old testament.

outside of the book of romans and some of Paul's other letters, I have not been overly concerned with some of the new testament. Luther himself didn't think much of the books of James or revelation, so I'm in good company.

The four gospels and the person of Jesus Christ are what captivate me.

Luther says, "the bible is the cradle in which we find the Christ child." Jesus is the core, the center, the revelation of God.

Love one another as I, the God who became a baby just like you, loves us.

Jesus Christ loves those we would typically think are the least lovable.

He hangs out with the bums and hookers and doesn't judge them

Jesus loves the folks on the edge of society, the losers, the misfits, the religious outcasts

He touches the untouchables. He moves to the margins with the marginalized. He casts his lot with the outcasts. He makes his home with the homeless.

When we are at our worst, God's best calls us his friend

What makes this critical for the practice of following Christ is that all the people Jesus loved in his face-to-face encounters were people who could not hide their broken humanity, which is what most people spend their time doing

When you are mentally ill—once ascribed to demons—you cannot hide it

When you are ostracized because you are physically ill, you cannot hide it

When you are poor, you cannot hide it

When you're a black sheep, you stand out from the white sheep

When you're a whore, you don't look like a nun

When you don't hang out with the beautiful people, you don't get social media followers

This is who Jesus loved and loves

What about in our day?

Not much different.



When I was in 7th grade, I had my first rock and roll band—the castaways.

We played at a school assembly and the girls started screaming, as if we were the Beatles.

We figured we had it going on.

We had scheduled our first paying job—at a CYO dance at a catholic church.

The day before the dance, the catholic church cancelled, saying that they had been warned there was going to be trouble at the dance.

As we found out the next day, they cancelled the dance because they found out our bass player was black.

Our bass player was Clem Willis, son of bill Willis, one of the first two black professional football players. Bill Willis, who was a pro bowl defensive lineman for the Cleveland browns. We'll try to forgive him for playing for the browns.

Mr. Willis was later head of the Ohio youth commission, working on behalf of at-risk youth.

I was heartbroken and, since I went to an integrated Lutheran church, I could not understand how a church could be racist.

Ah, the innocence of youth....

God comes to us as our life.

For me, it was grace to cross the racial divides as a teenager. It was grace to sit in the pews with blacks and whites. It was grace to have a friendship and musical partnership with Clem.

It was grace that our tenor sax player was Jewish.

See, Jesus says “I no longer call you servants, but friends.”

Grace is having experiences in life where your interactions are with people not like you—with people who the society wrongfully judges. This leads you to have a more expansive view of the human race.

I call you friend, says Jesus, and there are no qualifiers—I call you friend not because you are white and straight, which seems to be the conclusion of too many people today

But if you arrived from mars and went to a church on Sunday morning, you would likely conclude that Christianity is about being white and straight and middle class.

Not much has changed since that band job was cancelled over 65 years ago.



Love one another as I have loved you.

If you find it hard to love someone because she is black, because he is gay, because they are Muslim, because she is a trans woman, because he speaks broken English, because her clothes are shabby, because he lives on the wrong side of tracks, you, my friend, have spiritual work to do....

As I study the gospel, Jesus does not seem to love one kind of person: the religious alt-right of his days: the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The rule keepers. The religious in-crowd. The holier-than-thou inner circle.

Jesus calls them white washed tombs. Lovely on the outside but rotting flesh on the inside.

He tells them the whores are streaming into the kingdom of God before them.

He calls them hypocrites—looking good on the outside, but filthy inside.

It's actually pretty simple: if you think you are okay in the sight of God, you're not. If you think you're not okay with God, then you are.

That old cliché: hate the sin, but love the sinner is ridiculous.

Who has the right to say one sin is worse than the other? You ever notice that people who say this never seem to think that their sin is much of a problem? It's always the other guy.

We are all broken. We are all messed up in one way or another. We all have parts of us that are not pretty.

But God loves us as we are and we are asked to love others in their brokenness just as God loves us.

Grace flows from God to us and now grace is meant to flow from us to other people.

Now if you find yourself judging and excluding people because of who they are, it's okay as long as you realize your failing and vow to work on it.

We are all vulnerable flesh and blood. Each of us is still a work in progress. Just be sure you're making progress in your spiritual work.

As the mystic, Rumi, says, 'your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.'

If you have experienced being loved by Jesus; if you know you are being loved this minute, then you may find gratitude in your heart.



Be grateful for your suffering. There is nothing like suffering to break down the ego's small, self-protective, self-centered stance in life.

Suffering alone has the power to force us to let go of our small life and find ourselves in God's expansive world.

When the ego's door is blown down, then God can come in.

Be grateful that each morning we rise to a world that is pure gift. We didn't do anything to deserve this incredible world even as we suffer covid-19 together. But even this suffering has the power to help us help those around us.

Let's be grateful for these musicians who show up every week and rehearse and offer this worship service: Pat, Jason, Frank, Troy, TI, Julian.

Join me in being grateful for the staff here at clc who work so hard to make clc a place where we work to love whoever shows up at our door:

Shareen Jordan and Emily Kosovo.  
Council president Beth Rios  
Maureen Herbster and pat Bauer.  
Mandy Freiss and Michelle Hilliard.  
Ed kasha and Jade Lane  
Sherrie Lane and Paul Bell  
Rheba Selac and Patty Ellison...

Gratefulness can lead to generosity....

When I was in elementary school, my father was principal of a junior high school on the south side of Columbus, Ohio. The south side was the poor side of town, both black and white.

Around Christmas, dad and I would go to the south side to an independent grocery store, owned by Fred Erfurt, a kindly German. Dad would load up grocery carts and off we would go, with the car already loaded with coats, boots, gloves, and now food.

Dad seemed to know who, among his students, had the toughest time of it. At each house we would leave a coat or some gloves or boots and, of course, food.

We didn't ring doorbells. We just left what we had come to give away.

I am grateful for that experience. It put in me the value of caring for other people in whatever way I can.



And so clc offers you two opportunities to give it away this holiday season.

First, a thankful thanksgiving. We want to give as many families as possible, all the food for a great thanksgiving meal: a turkey, all the side dishes, and a pumpkin pie from grant bar.

Second, a joyful Christmas. Again, we want to help families in need have a great Christmas.

We've already agreed to fulfill three Christmas wishes for residents of two group homes in mill vale. And we have already been hearing from families who need help in providing a joyful Christmas for their children.

Love one another as I love you.

You can generously give by:

Putting a donation in the box in the lobby

Go to our website, [clcmillvale](http://clcmillvale.com), where you will find a way to donate to either or both: a thankful thanksgiving and a joyful Christmas.

Drop a donation by the church office.

Send your contribution by mail.

God in Jesus Christ, our friend, asks us to gracefully, and gratefully, and generously love one another in this very specific way.

#### **SERMON SONG**

What You Give Away (Vince Gill)