

The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza
Trinity Episcopal Church
The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – August 2, 2026
Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22 & Matthew 14:13-21

Good morning, again. I can't tell you how happy I am to be here with you this morning. Now, I know what you want from this sermon – you just want me to talk all about myself and my family. But I think I need to preach the Good Word a little bit first. I know, I know... what a downer. Sometimes, however, what a preacher preaches and the way she preaches it reveal even more about a person. So, here goes.

The Psalmist today joyfully proclaims that love is the frame through which we may see and understand God. We just chanted the psalm but for many of us who are not trained singers, we may have been paying more attention to how to sing the words rather than reflecting on the message being communicated. So, allow me to read the passage to you again.

*8 The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, *
slow to anger and of great kindness.*

*9 The Lord is loving to everyone *
and his compassion is over all his works.*

*15 The Lord upholds all those who fall; *
he lifts up those who are bowed down.*

*16 The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, *
and you give them their food in due season.*

*17 You open wide your hand *
and satisfy the needs of every living creature.*

*18 The Lord is righteous in all his ways *
and loving in all his works.*

*19 The Lord is near to those who call upon him, *
to all who call upon him faithfully.*

*20 He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; *
he hears their cry and helps them.*

*21 The Lord preserves all those who love him, *
but he destroys all the wicked.*

*22 My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord; *
let all flesh bless his holy Name for ever and ever.*

This passage proclaims that God is love and, as such, it is God's nature to be loving to everyone. All that is asked of us is to love God and to love others as God loves. This is less of a pre-condition than a necessary and appropriate response to God's outrageous blessing of love. Indeed, it is only because that God loves us first that we are enabled to respond in love.

The promise then is that when we receive God's love rightly and love God in response, we are blessed with comfort of spirit and our needs satisfied. If we are in right loving relationship with God and neighbor, God will take even our meager offering of five stale loaves of bread and two sad fish and multiply it into an abundant feast to feed a multitude... with plenty left over. Surely, the psalmist says, the only appropriate response to God's outrageous unmerited love is to sing praises to the Lord and bless his holy Name.

This is God's eternal call to love – this is love-in-action. Indeed, the good news of God in Christ only makes sense when love is the frame. If we are made in the image of God, then we are made to be like God in how we love... outrageously and holding nothing back.

This call to love forms the very heart of Christianity. Jesus declared that to be his disciples – to live, participate, and be caught up in the way of life that he embodied – we are to love. Indeed, Jesus reduces the whole of the Hebrew Law to the simple commands to love God with all our heart and mind and soul, and to love one our neighbor as ourself. And then, in John's Gospel he simplified this even further, giving his disciples a new commandment to love one another as he loved them.

Now, while it may be simple, this charge is most certainly not easy. It is my experience that humans have an almost infinite capacity to distort God's law of love and to justify our acting in non-loving ways. The Ten Commandments to Lord God gave Moses were literally etched in stone, and yet weren't enough to curb our selfish distortions, nor was the highly, highly detailed Levitical law. And the prophets and judges that followed provided only temporary correctives to our propensity to sin. This is why we need a Savior. This is why we need the incarnation – to show us, in human form, what it looks like to rightly love God and neighbor... to love in community.

I believe that in order to take seriously God's charge to "love your neighbor as yourself," it requires that we see – truly see – our neighbors. As Presbyterian minister and writer Frederick Buechner wrote, "we must see not just their faces, but the life behind and within their faces." Jesus teaches that love is the frame through which we are to see each other, because that is how God sees us. One of the greatest gifts we can give to another is to see them... to behold them fully... to know them as they really are: a complex mixture of both sinner and saint. And to love them anyway. This vision – this seeing, knowing, and loving – is how we love in community.

Over these next months, I look forward to getting to know you – to see you. I want to hear your stories, and I want to share mine. I want to hear your stories of triumph, great love, and how God has brought about surprising new life in your lives. I also want to hear your stories of failure, sorrow, suffering, and disappointment – and I want to hear how God might have been working through all of that as well.

For us to be a community that sees and knows each other, we must also see and know ourselves. We have to learn how to tell our own stories – to share our lives, with all our joys and sorrows, with each other. I know this sounds like it would be so simple, right? After all, these are our stories. Yet this is often more difficult than you'd think and practically nothing in our culture encourages this sort of truthful and vulnerable sharing.

In the coming Sundays, I will share various parts of my story. Hopefully, you will receive them as the gifts they are intended to be. My story is mine, and I have no expectations that yours will be the same. I want to share them with you because that is one way that I can love you. I want you to see me – see me not only as your Rector, Pastor, and Priest, but see me also as a fellow disciple joining you as we journey the Way of Jesus. A disciple with my own peculiar mix of the brokenness of this mortal life and the strength that can come from healing.

So, now let me re-introduce myself: my name is Christine. I am a mother, wife, daughter, friend, priest, and alcoholic 22 years in recovery. With humility and great joy, I accepted your Vestry's call to serve this parish family as your next Rector. I can't wait to discover all the ways the Holy Spirit is alive and active in this community.

My family and I arrived in The Woodlands just three weeks ago from Northern Virginia, which had been our home for the past nine years. My husband's name is Jonathan. He was born and spent his early years in Mexico City. At the age of 14, he came to the United States, joining his father in McAllen, Texas. He graduated from the University of Texas at Austin and works professionally as a Technical Communicator. Besides his family, Jonathan's real passion is playing soccer, so be sure to tell him if you know of any local adult leagues.

We met when we both were living in Austin and we have been married for 27 years. We have one fabulous daughter, Emma, who is the light of our lives. She is a recent graduate of James Madison University and will be moving to Dallas later this fall.

I was born in San Antonio on an Easter Sunday, when the Hill Country wildflowers were in full bloom. I was raised in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and my family still lives in the area. I was brought up unchurched and agnostic, yet I have always felt God's call. For decades, I tried to find my way to God – fumbling around and through whatever means were at my disposal. But it wasn't until I completely fell apart and there was no longer enough of me left to get in my way that I discovered that God had been right there with me all along.

From this discovery and from the love and grace of God poured out upon me so abundantly, I learned that our God is one who brings new life out of dead things. I learned how it is that Jesus can say that the Kingdom of God is in-breaking in our midst – right now – even as we await its coming in fullness. I am one who is living a resurrected life today, and I yet I am continually being transformed by God's grace. When I see myself clearly through the frame of love, I am able to recognize how the Spirit is moving and working in my life, as well as in the world around me, all the time. And it is in those very moments that I am given a taste of the kingdom of God.

For today, let us rejoice in all the ways that the Spirit is moving in our own lives and in our shared life at Trinity. Let us celebrate and give thanks for God's continual work of transformation and sing our praises to God and bless his holy Name. May we become a community of disciples that sees and knows ourselves and each other through the frame of God's love – seeing in each other the life behind and within our faces.

Amen.