

"Live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." I'm sure you are more accustomed to hearing this quotation as, "Walk in love, as Christ loved us..." As a priest I have used these words regularly to introduce Sunday offerings. From attending services in many places since I retired I would bet these are the most used of the Offertory Sentences provided in the Prayerbook. "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God."

How do we go about "walking in love, as Christ loved us"? Actually, the whole sentence says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live (or walk) in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Our first Lesson tells us about the prophet Elijah. He has just won a powerful contest with the prophets of Baal, but he knows he has brought the wrath of queen Jezebel upon himself. Now he has gone out into the wilderness and laid himself down under a tree. I'm not a psychiatrist, but I would bet good money that Elijah is in deep depression. We read, "He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep." After a while he is awakened by an angel with bread and water. He sleeps again and is given more bread and water, and in the strength of that bread he travels forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb. That must have been powerful bread. Of course we know it is the bread of heaven, the bread Jesus claims he is in the Gospel.

The Bible keeps reminding us to keep the commandments of the LORD and to walk in his ways. We live in a society when much of the world around us is unsure what values really are. Without God values become relative, the ideas of right and wrong get fuzzy. It is easy for us to get into the same boat, and allow our Christian values to be relative, but we know better. God has given us commandments. While I would never want these commandments to be interpreted in a legalistic or punitive manner, they are still commandments. God expects us to live good lives, to be faithful in our duties to God, and to be faithful to each other. There is good and there is evil. A true sign that we are truly walking in love is that we are truly trying to live morally upright lives, following the precepts of God in Christ.

Now I mentioned not interpreting the commandments in legalistic or punitive ways, and that leads us to another mark of walking in love. Paul is very clear about this, "Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you." Jesus is even more clear, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14-15) Forgiveness is one of the greatest marks of Christian kindness and love. One place where we get hung up on forgiveness is when we think we are to forgive for the sake of the other person. If the hurt has been especially painful this makes it hard to forgive. The truth, however, is we need to forgive for ourselves. We forgive to relieve ourselves of the burden of hate and anger. We forgive so we can be free. This can be good for the one who has hurt us, but it's better for us. God in Christ gives us the power to forgive.

In the Lesson from Ephesians, thieves are told to steal no more but to earn a living with their hands. Many of us might have felt very uncomfortable in a New Testament Church. They weren't the best people, but they were people who knew they were loved and forgiven. Much Christian piety has dwelt on our unworthiness, and a lot of modern folk find that a little discomfiting. We would do well to have a little better sense of the depth of our own need for forgiveness. It may be that we don't love enough because we don't realize how much we are

loved. A true sign that we are walking in love is that we are patient and kind with one another and we sincerely want to forgive others those things that have hurt us most.

Jesus spoke to the people in Capernaum and he said, "Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever." Another mark of walking in love is eating the bread of life. The most common way we eat the bread of life is in our holy Communion, but there are other ways. We can even eat the holy Communion and not really receive the bread of life. The most important idea is that we are inviting Jesus to come more and more into our lives, and to be Lord of our lives. We can also eat the bread of life in prayer, the study of scripture, and in fellowship with the people who are the Body of Christ, his Church. An important sign that we are truly walking in love is that we sincerely want Jesus to be Lord and Master of our lives.

Last week and today we visit the theme of bread of heaven. We have talked about God humbling his people by feeding them manna in the wilderness. We have seen Elijah make a journey of forty days and forty nights on the strength of two loaves of bread. Today we have talked about Jesus as the bread of life. When God feeds us at the holy table we should feel humbled. We should recognize our lack of perfection. Then we should reach forward with eager hands to receive Christ more and more into our lives. We are not worthy but we are invited.

"Walk in love, as Christ loved us..." We can walk in that love. We can be imitators of God, and more like Jesus. To do that we need to remember we do not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from God; we need to remember God's commandments and try to live our lives in accordance with those commandments; we need to be kind and to forgive as freely as we are forgiven; and we need to welcome Christ into our lives more and more, eating the bread of heaven. With Jesus more and more in our lives we may even be able to do something that is good, beautiful and holy.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Proper 14 The Sunday closest to August 10

Track 1 *or* *Track 2*

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33
Psalm 130
Ephesians 4:25-5:2
John 6:35, 41-51

1 Kings 19:4-8
Psalm 34:1-8
Ephesians 4:25-5:2
John 6:35, 41-51

The Collect

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33

The king, David, ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.” And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom. So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword. Absalom happened to meet the servants of David.

Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.

And ten young men, Joab’s armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.

Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, “Good tidings for my lord the king! For the Lord has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you.” The king said to the Cushite, “Is it well with the young man Absalom?” The Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man.”

The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

The Psalm

Psalm 130*De profundis*

- 1 Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD;
LORD, hear my voice; *
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.
- 2 If you, LORD, were to note what is done amiss, *
O Lord, who could stand?
- 3 For there is forgiveness with you; *
therefore you shall be feared.
- 4 I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him; *
in his word is my hope.
- 5 My soul waits for the LORD,
more than watchmen for the morning, *
more than watchmen for the morning.
- 6 O Israel, wait for the LORD, *
for with the LORD there is mercy;
- 7 With him there is plenteous redemption, *
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

or

Old Testament**1 Kings 19:4-8**

Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

The Psalm**Psalm 34:1-8***Benedicam Dominum*

- 1 I will bless the LORD at all times; *
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.

- 2 I will glory in the LORD; *
let the humble hear and rejoice.
- 3 Proclaim with me the greatness of the LORD; *
let us exalt his Name together.
- 4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me *
and delivered me out of all my terror.
- 5 Look upon him and be radiant, *
and let not your faces be ashamed.
- 6 I called in my affliction and the LORD heard me *
and saved me from all my troubles.
- 7 The angel of the LORD encompasses those who fear him, *
and he will deliver them.
- 8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; *
happy are they who trust in him!

The Epistle

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

²⁵So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³²and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. ¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ^{5:2}and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

John 6:35, 41-51

³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day." ⁴¹Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴²They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" ⁴³Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the

Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”