

Tad Wolcott

Senior Sermon on Youth Sunday, May 22, 2022

Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria VA

Gospel of John 14:23-29

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. This is what Jesus says to Judas, the son of James, in response to being asked why he shows himself only to the disciples and not to the world. Moreover Jesus says “These words are not my own; they belong to the father who sent me.” Jesus is the worldly manifestation of God. He is what God sent to guide us and show us how to live in his will. But God’s reach into our world doesn’t just end with Jesus, or his disciples. It goes far out, into every corner of our world. It extends from the words leaving my lips to a breath being drawn on the other side of the earth. From the Choir loft to the congregation. From a smile to a wave on opposite sides of the street. You can see God anywhere and everywhere.

To see God is to see love, and to see the love we give each other. It’s his holy extension through us, with which we exercise his will. Through loving each other we give to each other. And that was Jesus’s message to his disciples, that, although he had brought many great things to this earth, it would ultimately be left in our hands, for his message to prosper. To build our new foundation on the love of each other, and ultimately the love of the Father. Our own brotherly love is divine.

C.S Lewis describes our chief aim for Love as Agape. It’s the unconditional love God has given us through Jesus. He says that all other forms of love act as a sort of training ground for Agape. But I think that all forms of love are really Agape. If we are beings of God, sculpted and made by the father, then isn’t it our most important mission to love each other? We are reflections of God himself, and thus our shared love is that of the Father. Another name often used for Agape is charity. And what’s more showing of human love than charity. Giving to another, unconditionally, out of the love for your fellow person. That’s God’s love.

And we do it everyday, especially here at Grace Church. We give to each other unconditionally. We share our love through our worship and our praise. Through our singing, and the beautiful noise which we create together in this space. Through our conversations at Coffee Hour, through our donations which keep a roof over our heads to continue our shared love in this church. And we give to the community, through our food pantry and our other outreach programs. Sharing our unconditional love for humankind. We are spreading it out into the world, giving as the world gives. Because the world gives so much, and this church gives so much.

This church, for the better part of my admittedly small 18 years has given me so much, and shown me the ways of Godly love. I think many people when I tell them that I attend church conjure up some image of a preacher in a stuffy white color yelling for an hour straight about

the greatness and might of God. An authoritarian perception of him, where his love solely flows down through the preacher and out to the congregation. But if there's anything I've learned from this church, it's that love doesn't just come from the pulpit. It comes from you, and from me. It comes from my Sunday school teachers, who've taught me the lessons and will of God. And in doing so have shared with me his love. It comes from youth nights, bowling together, shopping for Thanksgiving Baskets. Our collective love is shared between each other, and that love reflects out into the community.

It comes from Pilgrimage. On another continent in a strange land, the only form of familiarity is the people you have with you. And it's your laughs, and complaining. Your joys and sorrows, your shared experience, and shared camaraderie. It's your love for each other that really allows you to appreciate the experience together. It's the unconditional love I have received from this parish throughout my time here. How every member of this church brings with themselves the capacity to love, and expresses it through our joined worship. It's this love that this church has given me.

Jesus may have suffered to save me, he has given me and this world a great deal. But I would be remiss if I weren't to mention how great the abundance this world, and this church has given me. How they've loved me unconditionally, in God's love. So join me in the peace and love of God.