

SERMON  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
May 2, 2010

Acts 11:1-18  
Psalm 148  
Revelation 21:1-6  
John 13:31-35

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen

For decades, a favorite cartoon strip was one called; “Peanuts”, starring Charlie Brown. And of course, Lucy, Linus and Snoopy. The author, Charles Schultz, who died just a few years ago was a devout Christian.

Schultz often used his cartoons to express his interpretation of the Gospel. In the cartoon strip, Lucy always symbolizes original sin – she is always doing something bad – tempting, taunting, and stirring up trouble.

Charlie Brown is always portrayed as a loser. He is always doing something wrong, not quite measuring up, missing the mark, not getting it quite right. Charlie probably symbolizes you and me.

Then there is Snoopy the Dog. He is often the Red Barron figure – the Jesus figure, who comes to the rescue. In the end, Snoopy saves Charlie from the messes that he has gotten himself into. Okay, that’s stretching the theology a little bit, but let’s go with it for now.

One of the best cartoon stories that Charles Schultz ever wrote was the one entitled; “The Little Red Headed Girl” or “I Love You Charlie Brown.” I would like to tell you this story as an illustration of our need to be accepted and loved. Listen to see if you can find yourself in this story.

Charlie Brown was in love. Linus knew something was going on because Charlie Brown hadn't been feeling very well lately. His stomach was upset; he was distracted; and Linus had seen Charlie looking over at the little red headed girl on the school bus one day.

Even more important than that, one day Linus saw Charlie playing the daisy game. You know the daisy game; "she loves me, she loves me not, she loves me, she loves me not."

Finally, Linus figured out what was going on, and so he approached Charlie and spoke to him bluntly; "You like the little red headed girl, don't you Charlie?" Charlie was so upset. He was flabbergasted. He was embarrassed. Now another person knew that Charlie Brown was in love with a girl.

Well, that same day, Charlie Brown went to school, and the teacher asked Charlie to come up in front of the whole class room and read his report to all of the kids in the class. Charlie was not very good speaking in front of people. His stomach was in knots. He was flustered and frazzled. He fumbled through his papers to find his report.

In his frustration, Charlie finally decided to just read the first page, the top page, regardless of what it said. Charlie read aloud: "Dear little red headed girl, do you like me? Yes or No, Charlie Brown". Oh No! He read the wrong paper! The whole class laughed at him and there is nothing worse than having the whole class laugh at you.

Well, the next day was the last day of school, and Charlie couldn't go all summer long without knowing if the little red headed girl liked him. He HAD to know. It would be a long, long summer, if he didn't know. What would he do? So Charlie made his plans.

He would go early the next morning and get on the school bus and ask her directly if she liked him or not. He set his alarm clock early, so as not to miss the bus. It was four o'clock in the morning that the alarm went off. He struggled out of bed and made his way to the bus stop by 4:30.

He sat down on the bench to wait for the bus. While sitting there waiting for the bus, Charlie began to dose off, and then fell fast asleep. He was suddenly awakened by the roar of the bus engine as it pulled away from the bus stop.

He saw the flash of the little red headed girl's flaming red hair in the back window of the school bus as it pulled away. Oh no! Rats! He missed the bus. He failed again.

Charlie finally got to school after a long walk. He was tardy so he received a late slip. He could hardly concentrate on his studies that day. Suddenly, the day was over and he realized that he had only one chance left. Only one – the ride home on the school bus.

The bell rang. He shot out of the school, and he stood there in line as the hordes of kids kept pushing and shoving and crowding around him. Finally, he was able to squeeze onto the bus. But where was the little red headed girl?

The bus started to pull away from the curb. And as he looked out the window, he saw the little red headed girl standing on the curb waving to someone on the bus.

Oh no! Failed again. Another crushing blow. He hung his head and put his hands in his pockets. As he slumped into his seat on the bus, he felt a piece of paper in one of his pockets that shouldn't have been there. Somebody must have bumped into him and put a note into his jacket pocket.

He opened the note. It said: "Dear Charlie, I like you Charlie Brown; the little red headed girl."

Oh! Charlie was so happy. He jumped. He danced. He clicked his heels in the air, and he read the note over and over again; "I like you Charlie Brown." Charlie felt so good inside. And now all summer, he would be happy because he knew that he was liked by that little red headed girl.

You see, this story about life is a parable. It is a story about a character named Charlie Brown. But more importantly, we know that the story is about us – about you and me. The story addresses the most important question in life – am I liked? Am I loved? Do you like me? Do you love me? So simple; yet so profound.

Jesus said; “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” Did you hear that? “Just as I have loved you.” Indeed, we are loved!

Several years ago, Tina Turner came out with a hit song entitled; “What’s love got to do with it.” In the song, she sings, “love is nothing more than a second hand emotion.”

Now, of course, most of us would probably disagree with that statement. For we see love as something that is much more than a second hand emotion. We see it as something much deeper. But let’s reflect on this for a moment. How would we define love?

I went to “dictionary.com” and found 18 definitions of “love”. They all described “love” with such phrases as “feelings of passion and affection, strong liking, sexual desire, feelings of warm personal attachment.” In other words, perhaps love is seen primarily as a feeling – an emotion.

But this is not the love that Jesus talks about with his disciples. Jesus, on the evening before his arrest said to his disciples; “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.” He didn’t say; “I want you to have loving feelings about one another.”

Now, don’t get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with feelings that can come with loving another person. They are truly a blessing from God and are a vital part to any relationship. However, this is not what Jesus was talking about in our Gospel story this morning.

Think about it. Jesus gave us a command to “love one another.” Now if love is merely an emotion, how can we control it? How can we obey this command? For we cannot control how we feel, but only how we act on those feelings.

You see, instead, Jesus was calling his disciples to action, not feelings. The Greek word Jesus uses for love here is “*agapao*.” It means, “to seek the best for another with no thought of what you might receive in return, even when we don’t want to, even when they don’t deserve it, and yes, even when they might not appreciate it”.

Jesus goes on to give a further description of love when he says, “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” What Jesus is telling his disciples is that they are to love each other in the “same manner” in which he loved them. Perhaps, that kind of love is best modeled in a parent’s love for a child.

Now I know that you think that your parents stayed awake at night having wonderful feelings about how awesome you are. They counted their blessings to think what a privilege it was to have given birth to such a loveable human being.

However, this may come as a shock to you, but there have been times when their feelings about you were anything but loving. Those times when you stayed out late without permission. Those times when you talked back for the umpteenth time during the day. Those times when they caught you in a lie.

Those times when you broke your promises. Those times when you didn’t follow through with what you said you were going to do. Those times when they had to bail you out financially.

During those times, your parents not only didn’t have feelings of love, they actually didn’t like you very much.

But listen to this. That did not mean that your parents stopped loving you. For their love for you is not based on how they feel about you at a particular moment. Rather, their love for you is based upon a commitment they made when you were born – when they took on the responsibility of parenthood – when they chose a path of self-sacrifice for the sake of their children.

In other words, this love that Jesus calls us to demands sacrifice. It is a love that is measured by what it cost us, rather than what we receive from it.

This following story is told of Mother Theresa entering a home for the gravely ill and dying. Just to warn you in advance, some descriptions in this story are quite graphic and disturbing.

At one bedside was a young nun who was cleaning a gaping wound in the neck of a woman being devoured by maggots. The exposed flesh was covered with the squirming creatures. The nun was removing them one by one with a pair of tweezers held at arm's length.

“No, sister, you haven't the idea”, said Mother Theresa sternly, moving into her place. Using a scalpel, she began to cleanse the wound with expert strokes, her face just inches away from the wound. As she cut into it, the stench increased. But she did not pull back.

Finally, she turned to the younger nun. “You must understand”, she said, “this is Jesus. We are cleansing the wounds of our Lord.” “Yes, Mother,” replied the repentant nun, taking the scalpel and moving forward with a brave smile, until her young lips were but a few inches away from the ugly wound, and the dying woman's open, glassy stare.

Jesus said, “This commandment I give to you... Love one another as I have loved you.”

I would like to close with the words of the great author/theologian C.S. Lewis.

C.S. Lewis says this about love: “To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal.

Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change.

It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love; is Hell.”

The more I think about it, the more I am so glad that God’s love for us is not based on how God feels about us. Rather, it is based on God’s commitment and God’s promise to us.

This is the essence of our faith. This is the Gospel. Because God first loved us, now we are called to love one another. It’s not a second hand emotion like the song claims. But instead, it is you and I, in action, following Jesus. Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting.  
Amen.

How many of you like to eat pudding? What is your favorite kind?

There's a saying that goes like this: "The proof is in the pudding." What do you think that means?

Let's say that your friend tells you that he or she can make the best pudding in the whole wide world. If you say, "The proof is in the pudding", you're saying that you will believe it only after you taste it.

In other words, you wouldn't believe them just because they said so. You would have to try it yourself to see if they were being truthful.

In our Bible story today, Jesus' followers were going around telling everyone that they were friends of Jesus – that they were his disciples. So Jesus told these followers how they could prove to the whole world that they were really telling the truth.

He told them that they should love one another the same way Jesus loved them.

We can say that we are followers of Jesus all we want, but how does Jesus say we can prove it? We can prove it by showing love for each other.

So instead of saying, "The proof is in the pudding", we might say, "The proof is in the loving".

Jesus loves us very much. He also knows that it is hard for us to always love each other. That's why he gave us special powers. We call these powers the Holy Spirit. When we believe in Jesus, Jesus will help us to love each other even when it is very hard to do.

That way, everyone in the world will know that we are disciples of Jesus.

Let us pray.....Dear Jesus, fill us up with your love so that we can love others just like you love us. Amen.