

**12 Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 18 – Year A – September 7, 2011 - Homily**  
**Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20**  
**Susan E. Wilmot**

At the age of thirty, the fourteenth century English mystic, Julian of Norwich, suffered a serious illness, and nearly died. During that time, when her life seemed to be in the balance, she received what she later called “sixteen showings” or revelations from God. She wrote of her *Revelations of Divine Love*, and I paraphrase in modern English: “What did I learn and learn well about the Lord in these revelations? ... Love was His meaning. Who showed it to me? Love. What did He show me? Love. Why did He show it to me? For Love. When we remain in His love, we will all learn and know more of that same love. But we won’t ever know or learn any other lesson in Him that is without end. That’s how I learned that Love was and is our Lord’s meaning in all things.”

Love. We have a hard time really understanding the word, because we use it so liberally to describe everything from the food we enjoy, to the deepest emotional attachments in our lives. Paul does not share our modern problem. For him love is faith in action, and perfectly embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is love: His mercy, care and compassion, His self-giving, His fulfillment of the Law, His perfect justice and freedom, His service to others, His wisdom and teaching, His healing and forgiveness, His gift of everlasting life in Him. Love is the lesson of discipleship. Love is our basis for transformation, and our motivation in daily life, including our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Paul’s letter to the Romans provides another aspect of life in the community that is the Body of Christ. As members one of another in the Body of Christ, we are more intimately connected than any familial connection – any earthly family links – because ours is an everlasting bond through our relationship in Christ. In this portion of Paul’s letter to the church in Rome, he speaks of love as the identity marker, the major characteristic that defines the attitudes, behaviors, and normative values of our community in faith. By saying, “who loves another has fulfilled the law” Paul is expressing the deepest truth of the Great Commandment. If we love God and one another as ourselves, we cannot possibly do harm to another, and have thereby fulfilled the Law.

What Paul also does is challenge us to see our sinfulness as the great leveler. I’m willing to bet that most of us have a hard time seeing murder, adultery, or theft on the same level of sinfulness as quarreling and jealousy. Or in the same way, that all these sins are equally covered by God’s grace and love through our faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. While we have to remember that sin is sin, we also know that we are all accountable for our lives. Nonetheless, in Matthew chapter 5, we read Jesus’ teaching, “‘You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment;... ‘You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5: 21-22, 27-28. Jesus really ups the ante in these verses. Is anger really on the same level as murder? Is looking at another with lust as bad as committing adultery?

In John 7:19, Jesus speaks to all who think they can live under the law, “Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law.” Even when we cannot live up to it, the Law has its purpose. It sets standards and boundaries for our common life in faith. Only Christ alone has been

able to keep the commandments of the Law. In other words, the Law cannot accomplish all the necessary changes we need to live faithfully in community. What the Law cannot accomplish, Love can. What God gave to Moses in the Law showed us how sinful we are, and how much we need a Savior. What God gives to us in Christ Jesus our Savior, is perfect love, forgiveness for our sins, and reconciliation with God. Our relationship of love with the Lord, transforms our hearts. Love changes who we are from the core of our being, so we become more Christ-like, more attentive to God's will, and empowered to practice love towards others. The spirit of the Law is fulfilled in this way: through faith and transformation in Christ Jesus. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Instead it builds and strengthens community, heals and reconciles us with God and others.

The behaviors that Paul lists as destructive and hurtful are still relevant today. They resonate with the seamier side of society as a whole in what we call binge drinking, hooking up for casual sex, and the power of groupthink through advertising and consumerism. Such things as "obey your thirst", "love the one you're with", and "just do it", exemplify immediate self-gratification, often without thought or care for the needs of the other. On the other hand, love that seeks the best for the other promotes justice, equality, and peace, and subverts covetousness and greed. Paul even tells us how to resist the urges of cultural indoctrination. We are to put on Christ, to put on the armor of light. That means walking the walk of faith and talking the talk of faith. It also means that our hearts and minds are renewed, and reoriented towards God in Christ Jesus.

Christianity is a way of life. We don't just practice our religion by coming to church for an hour or so every week, or by doing the occasional good deed. We live our faith daily. Our lives are attentive to each moment. We humbly seek and follow God's will. Life in Christ is the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us, fine-tuning our viewpoint and way of thinking, or even giving us a major attitude adjustment for our good, and the good of others. If we think of discipleship as driving a car, it's like the constant adjustments we make as we steer in order to stay on the road, braking or accelerating according to the rules of the road or the traffic around us, and obeying the signals and warning signs that keep us all safe.

Julian of Norwich sums it up in her understanding of the centrality of Love for all life. We experience glimpses of real life whenever we love as God loves us, and whenever we focus on Love as revealed to us in our Lord Jesus. Let's look for love in all the right places this week!

Amen.