

Easter IV Year B: 21/ 22 April 2018
St. James Episcopal Church, Clinton NY
The Rev. Gary Cyr, Rector

**Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found:
God judged us worthy of love regardless of the cost to God's self**

Acts 4:5-12
1 John 3:16-24
John 10:11-18
Psalm 23

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.”

I awoke Thursday morning to read the following headline in both, the Washington Post and the New York Times: Syracuse suspends engineering fraternity for racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic video. The article went on to share the transcript for some of the content of this video –

“Do you know what you signed up for today?” a fraternity member says [...] as he stands in front of a young man kneeling on the floor.

The young man on his knees then proceeds to make sexually explicit gestures as laughter erupts around him. Asked to recite “the oath,” he says: “f--- black people” and uses a racial slur to describe a person of Hispanic descent.

“I solemnly swear,” he says, repeating after the standing fraternity member, “to always have hatred in my heart for ...” He then says several racial slurs to describe African Americans, Hispanics and Jews.

I was disgusted after reading those articles. Now, I am angry. Angry, that such vitriol can exist in today's super-connected world; that such fascist ideology was being spoken and embraced in a university setting not 40 miles away from my home. Have we learned nothing in the past century – which was one of the bloodiest and cruelest in human history? It doesn't seem so. This is not about being politically correct. This is not something that is either Republican or Democrat, neither is it religious nor secular. Rather, this is about basic human dignity and respect for one another regardless

of differences. It is incredulous to my social justice sensibilities that this kind of rhetoric not only exists in the 21st century, but that it exists in pastoral Central NY. When the Bishop recently held regional listening sessions with regards to racial injustice, it was poorly attended in our area. Almost like we don't believe that's a concern for us here. This video testifies against that belief. Try as we may to deny its existence, racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and Islamophobic ideology is very much present in our communities. Then we read from today's second lesson: *"How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's good and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuse help."* Leave it to a pastoral epistle written in a different era to address modernity's concerns.

It would be easy – too easy – to quote "love thy neighbor" today, but our reading from 1 John sheds important light on the matter at hand. This particular epistle is written for a new generation of Christians, one that is experiencing different challenges from those Jesus and his Apostles faced. Written a whole generation plus away from that first-person experience of Jesus, the author of this letter is giving a message of hope to a young faith community seeking to live out Jesus's message of radical love and hospitality. The world, when it is filled with our egos, is a cruel place. When we turn a blind eye to injustice because it doesn't impact our daily lives, evil is left to fill in. Whether that community exists in the late first century or in the early twenty-first century, the Christian message is the same: love one another in truth and action, not just words or speech. In other words, let your actions align with your rhetoric. Put another way: walk the talk!

I trust in Jesus's message. Do my actions say the same? When I read those articles, I wanted those young men to be punished. I wanted them to face the consequences for their fascist ideology. My anger was such, I wanted them to experience what it feels like to be a minority on the fringes of society. To feel the fear one feels when one is labeled an outsider by a dominate group. But the Gospel continues to convict us by reminding me that each of those young men are children of God too and deserving of forgiveness. God's mercy isn't just for me, it's for all those God has judged worthy of love. The challenge is to repent from behavior that alienates us from one another and from God's love. Simply put, my Easter faith requires me to speak out against such dehumanizing expressions, to help and guide those who embrace such ideology towards repentance and forgiveness.

I was thus angry about the incident in Syracuse as well as angry with myself for harboring resentment towards those young people. I wasn't being very charitable which doesn't mean I don't

want those individuals to be held accountable. I do. But God's mercy and love is not mine to regulate and dispense according to my own standards. That is a hard lesson to live into, but one that Easter reminds me of. God judged us worthy of love regardless of the cost to God's self. Are we not called to do the same? As I sat with that, a hymn from my time as a youth in the Roman Catholic Church came to the forefront of memory and I share it with you as a means of summarizing today's epistle in light of our community's need to be aware and to speak out in charity and love wherever injustice exists:

Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found;
Brought here together by Christ's love, by love are we thus bound.
With grateful joy and holy fear His charity we learn;
Let us with heart and mind and soul now love him in return.
Forgive we now each other's faults as we our faults confess;
And let us love each other well in Christian holiness.
Let strife among us be unknown, let all contention cease;
Be His the glory that we seek, be ours His holy peace.
Let us recall that in our midst dwells God's begotten Son;
As members of His body joined, we are in Him made one.
No race or creed can love exclude, if honored be God's name;
Our family embraces all whose Father is the same.

Hymn: *Ubi Caritas*, tr. Omer Westendorf (1961)
Tune: CHRISTIAN LOVE, CM, by Paul Benoit (1961)