

Reverend John E. McGinn, Rector  
Saint John's Episcopal Church  
Sandwich, Massachusetts 02563

May 8, 2011  
Third Sunday of Easter  
Mother's Day

Today's sermon is taken from the epistle 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, chapter 1, verses 17-23.

For some people, we realize that Mother's Day might have been something invented by Hallmark cards, but still it's an important day. Since today is Mother's Day I thought I would begin with a list that someone has made which they call "Murphy's Laws of Parenting." See if you can identify with any of these:

- (1) The later you stay up the earlier your child will wake up the next morning.
- (2) The gooier the food the more likely it is to end up on the carpet.
- (3) The longer it takes to make a meal the less your child will like it.
- (4) A sure way to get something done is to tell a child not to do it.
- (5) For a child to become clean something else must become dirty.
- (6) Toys multiply to fill any space available.
- (7) Yours is always the only child who doesn't behave.
- (8) If the shoe fits it's expensive.
- (9) Backing your car out of the driveway causes your child to have to go to the bathroom.

Now, do any of these strike home? It isn't easy being a mom. I chuckled when I read a story by a mom named Mary. Mary says that when she was a young single mom with four children, it was difficult to get them all ready for church on Sunday. One particular Sunday morning as the children started to complain and to squabble, Mary stomped from one room to the other saying why it was important to go to church as a family and to have a good attitude. Suddenly she noticed all four children huddled together, and they were laughing. "What's so funny?" Mary asked. "Mom," they said, "Every time you slam down your foot smoke comes out; it must be the wrath of God." In reality it was the powder Mary had sprinkled in her shoes, but it worked. She said they made it to church on time that morning and practically every Sunday thereafter.

Now I'm not suggesting that you sprinkle powder in your shoes; I'm just reporting on Mary's interesting experience. What we don't want to do on Mother's Day 2011 is to take our mothers for granted. I've sited it before but the best example I know of that is the Mother's Day card that read like this: "Forget the housework, Mom; it's your day. Besides, you can always do double duty and catch up on Monday." (laughter)

I suspect some of you moms can relate to that, and since this is Mother's Day I want to draw your attention to the epistle that was just read, particularly the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse where we read these words. "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for others, love one another deeply from the heart." What a perfect text for a day when we honor our mothers. Love one another deeply from the heart. Note that these words are directed at the community of faith; they are not being written for the secular community. The writer of this passage uses phrases like, "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially." And a little farther he writes, "You know that it was not with perishable things you were redeemed, but with the precious blood of Jesus." And then still farther he writes, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for others, love one another deeply from the heart." But then he adds: "For you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God."

These really are not words that the secular world would even understand. These are words written for the community of faith. It is Christians to whom he is saying love one another deeply from the heart. Love, I believe, is the glorious burden of the Christians. Christians disagree about all kinds of things. We disagree on social issues; for example, some Christians are teetotalers when it comes to alcoholic beverages, others see no problem with drinking in moderation. We argue over how people are to be baptized and whether Jesus is present in the Eucharist. Christians subscribe to be liberal and conservative political philosophies. We have all kinds of differing interpretations of scripture. But one thing we cannot remove from the Christian community and still call ourselves followers of Jesus, is love -- deep, persistent, sacrificial love. We are a people who claim that God is love, and we are a people who are called to model love in the world. This is not to say that love does not exist in the secular world; it does. We see love lived out in many areas of our secular world.

A man tells a delightful story about an occasion when his cell phone quit working. This occurred just as he was trying to let his wife know that he was caught in a freeway gridlock and would be late for their anniversary dinner. He wrote a message on his laptop asking other motorists to call her. He printed it on a portable Inkjet that he had in the car, and he taped it to his rear windshield. When he finally arrived home his wife gave him the longest kiss ever. "I really think you love me," she said. "At least seventy people called and told me so."

We see love lived out in many areas of our secular world. The difference is that for the world, love is the exception not the rule. For the seventy who called his woman to tell her that her husband was caught in traffic, another five or six hundred probably passed by indifferently. Another seventy probably cursed the man for trying to burden them with his dilemma. That's the world operates -- love is the exception, not the rule.

Ask for help in the secular world when you are drowning, and someone is apt to throw you an anchor as a lifejacket; not always, of course. We see love lived out in many areas of our secular world. The difference is that for the world, love is the exception, not the rule. For Christians love is to be the rule; there can be no exceptions.

Jesus says in John 13, verse 35, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." Jesus said we are to even love people who are mean to us. No exceptions. Obviously we would like for there to be exceptions -- people who offend us, for example, or people who bully us.

I want to tell you about my nephew Jared's first birthday party which was some thirty-five years ago. Little Jared was the center of everyone's attention, and he was so happy that he did a little dance, and he was dancing all around. He was so cute until a jealous seven-year-old sister charged over and put both of her hands on Jared's chest and shoved. Jared fell hard. His rear end hit first and then his head. He looked utterly surprised at first, and no one had ever hurt him before. He did not know what to make of it, and then he opened up his mouth and howled, but not for long. His mother hugged him and helped him to his feet. The first thing that Jared did was to totter over to his sister. He knew his sister was at the bottom of this thing, but since such meanness was new to Jared, he didn't know what to do. So he did what he had always done -- he put his arms around his sister and laid his head against her body. What Jared did to his sister put an end to the meanness in that room.

That is what love is; not a warm feeling between like-minded friends, but plain old imitation of Jesus who took all the meanness of the world and ran it through the filter of his own body, replacing evil with good, blame with pardon, and death with life. Call it divine reverse psychology. It worked once, and it can work again whenever God can find someone else willing to give it a try.

For Christians love is to be the rule. There are no exceptions. Why? Because we are loved by God who makes no exceptions. Jesus put it like this in John 15, verse 12. "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Jesus makes no exception, and I don't think we can either.

Some of you may be familiar with Brennan Manning, a speaker and author who has inspired many, many people through his numerous books. Actually, Brennan was not the name that Manning was given at birth. To discover how he got his name, you have to go back to 1952 to a place named Busan, Korea. At midnight two best friends, Richard

Manning as he was know then, and Ray Brennan were side by side in a Korean foxhole awaiting orders. They were casually eating chocolate bars, and suddenly the unthinkable happened. A deadly hand grenade landed next to Ray Brennan. Then Ray Brennan did something quite extraordinary. Brennan casually tossed aside his candy wrapper and threw his body on the grenade and glanced a loving wink to Manning, his friend, and allowed the grenade to explode under him. He gave his life for Richard Manning. The ultimate sacrifice.

Eight years later when it came time for Manning to enter the Franciscan priesthood, he adopted a new name as was the custom at ordination. Because of the sacrifice of his friend, he took the name Brennan as his first name; thus he became Brennan Manning.

Now you know the rest of the story. Brennan Manning hoped to live as sacrificially in the same way his friend had modeled for him. Of course, this is the love that Jesus modeled for us. It is the very love of God. We see love lived out in many areas of our secular world. The difference is that with the world, love is the exception not the rule. For Christians love is to be the rule. There are to be no exceptions. Why? Because we are loved by God who makes no exceptions.

*Amen*

Transcribed by Phyllis K. Briggs