

Easter 6B  
Peace, Seattle  
May 10, 2015  
1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

## **LOVE LIBERATES**

The brilliant American poet, performer, and humanitarian Maya Angelou, who passed from this world a year ago this month, spoke often and poignantly about the liberating power of love.<sup>1</sup>

“My grandmother, my father’s mother, raised me,” Angelou said. “An amazing woman; she told me: SISTER, WHEN YOU GET, GIVE; WHEN YOU LEARN, TEACH. These are lessons to live by.

“I thought for a long time that my grandmother is God. She was so tall. And she used to tell me: SISTER, MOMMA DOESN’T KNOW WHAT SHE’S GOING TO DO, MOMMA’S JUST GOING TO STEP OUT ON THE WORD...JUST STEP OUT ON THE WORD OF GOD.

“Faith is the evidence of things not seen.

“People called me stupid, dumb, a moron, an idiot, because for I didn’t speak for six years. I was a mute. And Momma, used to tell me, when she braided my hair,  
SISTER, MOMMA DON’T CARE WHAT THESE PEOPLE SAY; THAT YOU MUST BE AN IDIOT, THAT YOU MUST BE A MORON BECAUSE YOU CAN’T TALK.  
SISTER, MOMMA KNOWS THAT WHEN YOU AND THE GOOD LORD ARE READY, YOU’RE GOING TO BE A TEACHER. SISTER, YOU’RE GOING TO TEACH ALL OVER THIS WORLD.

“I used to sit there and think, ‘this poor, ignorant woman—doesn’t she know I will never speak?’

- I’ve taught at the Habima Theatre in Tel Aviv.
- I’ve taught in Egypt.
- I’ve been visiting professor at the University of Exeter in England.
- I’ve taught in Rome, and all over the United States.

“And each time I have another honor, I think of my Grandma.

“So, I am grateful to have been loved, and to be loved now, and to be able to love. Because that love liberates. It doesn’t just hold—that’s ego. Love liberates.” - Maya Angelou

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**Love is all over our texts today.**

**We hear the word 5 times in the letter from John; and 8 times in the gospel.**

FIND YOUR RESTING PLACE, YOUR ABIDING PLACE IN MY LOVE, Jesus says.  
AND MOST OF ALL—LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.

**A shift takes place as Jesus approaches the time when he will leave his disciples behind, and we see that shift in our gospel today.** A shift in how he relates to them. No longer is the relationship to be analogous to master and servant. It’s changing to friend and friend.

I DO NOT CALL YOU SERVANTS ANY LONGER, he tells them, BECAUSE THE SERVANT DOES NOT KNOW WHAT THE MASTER IS DOING; BUT I HAVE CALLED YOU FRIENDS, BECAUSE I HAVE MADE KNOWN TO YOU EVERYTHING THAT I HAVE HEARD FROM MY FATHER.

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<sup>1</sup>We can see Maya Angelou tell this story, and others, by following this link: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/30/maya-angelou-oprah-rainbow\\_n\\_5413544.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/30/maya-angelou-oprah-rainbow_n_5413544.html)

No longer are they simply sitting at Jesus' feet taking in his wisdom, he's given them the knowledge and the understanding and the example to follow, and as they begin to do just that, they cross over to a deeper and more challenging level of relationship—that of friends.

Jesus calls his friends to be accountable to one another by sharing the same quality of love that he has shared. When we love like this, he tells them, we know our place in the world—who we are and to whom we belong, and this brings us true joy, and true liberation.

**In yesterday's Seattle Times** there was an article about the children who were born during the last years of World War 2 from romantic alliances between German mothers and Allied fathers.<sup>2</sup>

70 years now after the war's end, it's believed that at least 250,000 children came into the world as a result of those relationships. Now many of those children have embarked on quests to find their fathers.

When Paul Schmitz, one of those children, was a little boy, he never understood why kids in his tiny German village taunted him as a "YANK" and beat him up. He was a teenager by the time he found out: His father was an American soldier his mother had a romance with in the final days of WW2.

"I was a child of shame, a child of the enemy, even though it was the Americans who liberated us," says Schmitz, now a 69-year-old man. "All my life I had a yearning for my father, but until recently I was too afraid to actively search for him."

It was only after his mother had died and his own children had grown up, that Schmitz found the courage to look for his American father.

His search led him to the Belgian border village of Sourbrodt, across the border from where his mother, then 32, was evacuated by the Americans during the Battle of the Bulge. Schmitz found an old lady who remembered that his mother was friendly with a soldier named John, part of a medical battalion.

With the help of veterans groups and archives, Schmitz finally found out that his father was John Kitzmiller, a physician from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Kitzmiller was no longer alive. But Schmitz tracked down two half-sisters—and he met them during a trip to the US in 2011.

They took him out on family picnics, shared old pictures, show him his father's grave. And before parting, they handed him his father's old wristwatch.

"They told me that in America, it's always the son who inherits the watch," he said "and that's me." "I no longer feel shame. Today I have a feeling of happiness when it comes to family."

### **Love not only liberates, it brings us joy.**

In our Acts reading it's not so much the word "love" that dominates but rather love's consequence. The fundamental question facing the early church was, FOR WHOM IS GOD'S GOOD NEWS INTENDED? WHO IS THE GOSPEL FOR?

In the story of Peter and Cornelius, the decisive answer is given. A vision leads Peter to travel to the home of Cornelius, a Roman leader, and something powerful happens when Peter crosses the threshold of that home.

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<sup>2</sup> Seattle Times, May 9, 2015.

Cornelius shares his own vision with Peter, and Peter finally puts 2+2 together; a light goes on: [v 34]  
I GET IT! I UNDERSTAND! GOD DOESN'T PLAY FAVORITES!  
IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHO YOU ARE, WHERE YOU'RE FROM, IF YOU'RE EAGER FOR GOD, AND READY TO FOLLOW HIM, THE DOOR IS WIDE OPEN!

PETER goes on to give the whole household a thumbnail sketch of the Jesus story—his life, death and resurrection—and before he can even finish, the **Holy Spirit** comes upon everyone in that household, young and old, slave and free, male and female, and that's the part of the story we get with today's text.

This ACTS 10 experience—this OPENING UP of the gospel—was so important in shaping the life of the church, that Luke repeats the whole thing in chapter 11.

LOVE OPENS THE CIRCLE; LOVE SHARES THE BLESSING; LOVE LIBERATES.

Peter thought he knew what God's mission was about, but he was wrong! He had a dream for Christian community, but his dream had to be set aside in order for God's dream to flourish.

This story of liberation is all about getting out of the boxes we've built for ourselves and more importantly, the boxes we've built for God.

There is no greater love, Jesus says, than laying down one's life for one's friends. Hours after he spoke those words, he put them into practice on the cross.

As we celebrate today the love of those who have nurtured us in this world, we come to the Table to receive assurance of the freedom and joy that belongs to all God's children. The freedom of knowing we are loved with a forever love and are given the freedom to love as we have been loved.

Abiding in that love, we know who we are, and that we not only have a Savior, but a friend.

Amen.