

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 6/13/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, June 14 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, ask God blessing on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Pray for the many synods meeting in assembly this month. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we seek to be God's hands and voice in the world.*

As I mentioned in my sermon yesterday, there are primarily three Greek forms of the word “love” used in the Bible. *Philos* refers to the affection felt between family members and friends. The city of Philadelphia takes its name from *philos* and *adelphos*, which means brother, so Philadelphia is the city of “brotherly love.” The second word is *eros*. *Eros* is the root of our word “erotic” and refers to romantic and physical love. The third word is *agape* and is the form of love most often spoken in the New Testament. *Agape* is unconditional love, given without any sense of obligation and without any expectation of receiving something in return. It is the love that parents have for their children. It is the love that God feels and shows for us. And it is the love that we are called to share with one another.

Agape is the word that Jesus uses most times in the gospels. An interesting conversation between Jesus and Peter shows the implication of two of these words for love. In John 21:15-17, after the resurrection, Jesus encounters some of the disciples on the beach fishing. He begins a discussion by asking Peter, “Simon son of John, do you *agape* Me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “You know that I *philos* You.” Jesus said, “Feed My lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you *agape* Me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, You know that I *philos* You.” Jesus said, “Take care of My sheep.” The third time He said to him, “Simon son of John, do you *agape* Me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you *agape* Me?” He said, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I *philos* You.” Jesus said, “Feed My sheep.” It is notable that Peter at this point still doesn't grasp the difference between *philos* and *agape* when it comes to following Jesus. Another passage help us to more fully understand what the word means for those who follow Christ as His disciples. In Luke 6:27-28, Jesus says, “Love (*agape*) your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” Clearly the people named here will likely never return the love offered; yet we are to give it without expectation of any reciprocal response.

For those who claim Jesus as Lord and seek to follow Him, love (*agape*) is not an emotion. It is an action. It is not so much something we feel as it is something we do. In John 13:34-35, Jesus tells His followers, “A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.” Such love must be shown through our actions. Even when we do not care for someone, we are to treat them with the same kind of attention and concern that Jesus showed to all He met. As an action, this kind of love witnesses both to our faith in Jesus and to our desire to serve Him by serving others. This love must be visible so that others can see it and know that we are different, changed by the love of God in Jesus Christ.

A challenge for you in the coming week. See if you can *agape* someone whom you would otherwise ignore or pass by. Let the love of Christ move you to *agape* another as your witness to what you believe about God. Try to let *agape* rule your heart in every encounter you have.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey