

Sermon for 5th Sunday in Easter

May 2, 2021

John 15:1-8

Happy Easter!

This is the time of the season when we start to forget that it is still Easter. This week's lesson from John's first letter gives me an opportunity to start sharing some of my dream for Resurrection. But I also want to hold on to the season using a familiar image. You might guess it has something to do with love, and you're right, but it starts with an Easter egg. Specifically, a Cadbury crème egg.

You know the ones, the egg-shaped chocolates you break open and find egg colored creamy goodness inside.

Hold that image in your head for a little. I tried to find one to use as a visual aid, but the rest of the world seems to think that Easter is over, so we'll just have to imagine.

Most of the time, when we hear the word 'love,' we think of something like the sticky stuff inside the crème egg. Sweet and gooey. Something that holds us together, warm and comforting. And that is one aspect of what love is. And it's an important piece of the whole. But it can't stand on its own, and can actually be aggravating.

I hate having sticky hands. If my hands are sticky, I can't touch anything. If I pet the cat with sticky hands, I get fuzzy hands and the cat gets annoyed. I can't garden, I can't go to the beach...

That's why there's a chocolate shell around the crème, to give it shape and keep it from sticking.

Many - probably most - churches, think of themselves as a family. And that's a good thing. They are close to one another, they care for one another, they know each other's joys and challenges. They love one another, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

The difficulty with the idea of a church as a family is that a family is like the crème egg - soft and gooey in the middle, but hard to crack open. You can't just walk up to somebody's house and say, "You have the most wonderful family, can I move in with you?" We don't want a church with a shell outside.

But that hard shell is important. What would a crème egg be like without it? No shape, no form, just amorphous goo.

The chocolate shell is love too. How can chocolate not be love, right? It's the love that gives us shape. For many churches it's a set of beliefs, for Episcopalians it's the poetry, drama, and mystery of the liturgy. It's a love that's less gooey, firmer, stronger, better defined.

Sometimes dark, mysterious, and impenetrable. It is all the ways we accept God's love for us, and offer our love back to God, and it gives us our shape, and our very being as a

church. But it's often hard to get through.

"You can join the family when you have memorized the Westminster Confession," or "You'll be one of us when you understand the creed."

We need both the warm sticky love we have for one another, and the love of God to give us purpose, but what if the church turned everything inside out? What if we put the hard chocolate inside at our core, to give us shape and form, and the sticky love for one another on the outside?

Are you still picturing the easter egg? It isn't a very pretty picture anymore is it?

But think about what would happen. Everything that brushed against that easter egg would stick to it. Every person that encountered that kind of sticky love, the love and caring we show our family, would become stuck to it, sink into it, and take on the shape of the egg, with nothing to prevent them coming in. Every idea that we encountered, would cling, and be stuck.

It is a love that is not only open to other people and ideas, but that catches hold of them and will not let them go, and if they do go, the love sticks to them.

Now, I have said that I hate having sticky hands, and a sticky church will gather cob webs, pollen, sand, pet hair, and dust. Gross! It will gather people and ideas we might not like, might even want to keep out. It's a little scary to live that way with no protective shell around us, with nothing to stand between us and the world. It makes us vulnerable. But that's the perfect love of the cross, and perfect love casts out fear.

There may be nothing between us and the world, but the love of God is at our backs, and will never fail us nor let us go.

Yes, we will gather dust, but remember that you are dust, shaped into the image of God.

Yes, we will gather dirt, and I don't at all mean to say that all things are good, but rather that the Love of God at the center can redeem all things, and restore their intended shape. God is love, and God brought us to Easter for nothing else but to gather up all the dust and unite all things to him in love. To do that, the Church must face outward, and welcome the world in.

I went for a hike this past week and at the Blanton Ridge trailhead where the Ridgeline trail starts, I found a sign with a quote from one of my favorite writers, Kurt Vonnegut:

I want to stand as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you see all the kinds of things you can't see from the center.

That's my vision of the Church, a people that is solidly centered on the perfect love of the cross and open tomb, but stands fearlessly on the edge of the mystery open to all and curious about everything, a church that reaches out with love, not to seize hold and take control, but to stick on and draw in, and draw in and draw in, until all creation abides in Christ and all the world is shaped like Easter.