



**A Sermon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter  
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**Rev. Barbara Bond**

**New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH**

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[Sixth Sunday of Easter – The Episcopal Church](#)

God chooses us

Jesus is talking with his friends, the 12 disciples he has chosen to be witnesses and to carry out his teachings in the world. Jesus does not have much time left on this earth. It is the night of his last meal with the disciples, and he speaks for a long time – about three chapters worth – giving them his final instructions. Right now, he is speaking about love.

This wonderful gospel according to John was written in Greek, as were the other three gospels, and we must read them in translation. Some words are hard to translate into our English language and into our 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities. Our cultural surround is much different from Jesus' time, two

thousand years ago. Yet some things do not change. We strive to understand Jesus' teachings today, and the first stumbling block might be this word "love."

Greek has nine words for love, and we have one. All nine of those words meaning love have inflections of meaning. Our word for love includes all of the Greek meanings, but of course it is easy for us to get confused about that word love, given all its permutations in English. Love – is that love for my brother and sister? If so, the Greeks would say philia, like Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. Love – is that love for my spouse or partner? If so, it probably encompasses the Greek word eros, a love of physical attraction. What about our love in this community? The Greeks would call it agape. We know that word from our Maundy Thursday dinners, which we call Agape Feasts. There are six more Greek words for love, but these are the three that are easiest to understand in our own culture, and they are the meanings meant by our gospel writers. They usually mean Agape

How far does our love extend? Jesus says that we should abide in love – as if we are surrounded by love and interpret all our lives' events through this love. This doesn't mean we just enjoy dinner together. No, it means we are willing to lay down our lives for our friends. Now that is love!

I saw this demonstrated in a Disney movie you are probably all familiar with: Frozen, an animated classic based on a Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale, The Snow Queen. Anderson is from Denmark, and this particular tale has a northern European surround. Disney chose to place it in a Norwegian context, where ice and snow are prevalent. In the fairy tale, and in the movie, the Ice Queen shoots a particle of ice into the heart of a beloved one, and this will cause the Beloved to freeze to death.

Specifically, in the Disney movie, Elsa the older sister has strange powers that emanate in freezing the environment, and she leaves her kingdom for their protection. Her sister Anna follows Elsa, trying to convince her to come back, at which point Elsa shoots the ice into Anna's heart, and Anna begins to freeze. By the crucial moment, Anna lays down her life for her sister. She is faced with a choice: either save herself by letting her boyfriend kiss her back to health (that would be the eros definition of love), or save her sister (this would be the philia and agape form of love). She

loves her sister more than life itself and lays down her life, freezing to death and stopping a murderous man from attacking Elsa. In this climactic scene, Anna is turned to ice, and she assumes a cruciform stance: stiff, transparent, in the form of a cross. Her sacrifice takes a form we recognize. Most Disney fairy tale films have the princess being rescued by a prince and the couple getting married. But this moment in Frozen transcends that rather soapy platitude, and makes love a true, selfless choice.

Jesus tells his followers, and us, to abide in love, that love shall be our surround and shall help us make all our decisions. Do we choose to follow Jesus? I thought so, but Jesus says something wonderful here: You did not choose me, but I chose you. Our God loves everyone, and we are all chosen to be loved, and by extension, we are to love each other. This is the Christian imperative: love one another as Jesus loves us. This means loving without limit.

We are commanded to love one another, and to carry this message of love into the world. What would happen if everyone heard this message, and indeed loved everyone else? Hmm. Wars would cease. Families would be reconciled. Racism would end. Lying and cheating would have no point. Honesty would prevail. The Kingdom would come on earth, as it is in heaven.

Oh, what a wonderful vision! Can we do our own small part, to bring it to fruition? That the message of love should bear fruit, fruit that will last.