

Sermon 6 Easter 2026

John 17.1-11

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The more I read over today's Gospel from St. John, the more it hit me that this final prayer to Jesus disciples before the handcuffs were snapped, was the benediction from a mentor. He had built a tight community with folks who resonated with his teaching, schooling them, sending them out to make waves further away, yet always keeping them oriented and the community strong from the inside out. It was all about love in many shades.

Realizing this I have been awash in nostalgic affection for my favorite mentor in ministry and good friend who died the year I retired. Walter was a renowned New Testament

scholar, humorous, an apostle of non-violent resistance to injustice (he did a lot of resisting), During South Africa's apartheid days he wrote a small booklet on it and toured the country handing out his book to clergy, especially white clergy. The government soon threw him out, but he snuck back another way a couple of times, handing out his book and speaking especially to South African clergy. Walter did a mid-career shift to be a roving professor of a special method of Bible study he adopted of which I became a disciple.

This kind of mentoring can occur in psychotherapy and social work, teaching, as well as ministry and other pursuits where more of the subject is not taught so much as caught, because the message, really, is love.

This passage reeks of love. Jesus and God are one, which makes all those who are one with Christ Jesus are one with God. All are on the same 220 circuit. Jesus has grounded his growing group in love's depth.

Jesus is quick to confront "unlove" in the community. For example when the sons of Zebedee try for a top spot even using the help of their mother, he just shrugs, says God makes those decisions, and in the meantime the one who would be first must be servant of all. That is a lesson in cutting off bad competitiveness and turning it to good, to loving humility.

You parents in the room may have already seen this mentor pattern in your parenting years. Sure enough, the household is a community where we have far too many

opportunities to grow in love and yes, humility. And do we not hear those words, coming from our own mouths, thinking about our kids: “they are in the world. Holy Father protect them.”

It is moving to realize that this passage was given form by the apostle John, the only one of the twelve who lived to old age residing in Ephesus, probably identifying with Jesus’ mentor role. The wise old disciple who many called their teacher, and to whom we attribute a Gospel, approaching his own end of life. How are the kids going to do, suffering for their faith? Not much of the world knows a love ethic. John knew.

Even as I speak I am trying to figure out why this subject intrigues me so. I am not ready to kick the bucket. Like many of you, I have lived

a while and done a few things I care about. I have been a mentor to a few, as you have. I have taken a few knocks along the way, as you have. Like you, our teenage selves may not recognize the bodies we now occupy.

The answer (what else?) is Jesus. In our reading we see Christ Jesus surrender to his fate lurking just around the corner. He does not passively give up, but decidedly surrenders. He might have slipped over the hill and escaped into the desert. But he has finished what he believes God has asked of him. Whatever comes next is in God's hands.

How is your surrender quotient? I love the cartoon of a mean looking cat saying "Everything I ever let go of has claw marks on it." This passage is as close as Jesus comes to leaving claw marks. How about a different

phrase—“Everything I ever let go of has love marks on it.” In trust and in faith that love would somehow triumph he knows not particulars, he lets go.

In trust, O Lord, we seek your help in letting go and giving way to the purpose and joy you have in store for us. That in surrender to you, we know your deep love for us and the world you have made. Through the example of Jesus we ask.