

## Sermon for Easter 3 C

Acts 9:1-20; Rev. 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

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During this Easter season we are focusing on the resurrection of Jesus as fostering UNITY.

We all need unity – unity of mind, of will, of purpose.

Without it, nothing of significance happens.

It is essential for growth and progress.

If it doesn't exist, chaos wins the day.

Unity is oneness.

We think of– unison – with one voice

☐ Concord – with one heart and mind

☐ Unanimity – with one will

☐ Harmony – joined together

When we have unity of faith and purpose – within ourselves and in our relationships –

We experience less stress, are more productive, and are less likely to be depressed.

The scripture readings during this Easter season tell how the disciples of Jesus were drawn into unity of heart, mind, will, and strength,

and they point us to how we also can live in unity as the people of God. In our first message in this series, we learned about the unity of peace through forgiveness. Easter 3 C 2 10 April 20126 St. Peter York Acts 9:1-20; rev. 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

We receive forgiveness from Jesus as he gives his peace to us and we share that peace as we forgive one another.

Today's scriptures point us to the UNITY of LOVE FOR JESUS.

All of us learn to love from being loved.

For most, it begins with the love of mother and father or other infant caregiver.

As infants, we learn who holds us, who speaks kindly to us, who feeds us, and who cares for our needs.

In other words, we learn what it means to be loved.

And in being loved, we learn how to give love.

There are three kinds of love – filios – friendship or brotherly love, as we may think of Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love; or calling someone a bibliophile, lover of books.

There is eros – sexual love and passion.

And there is agape – the unconditional love of God for his people and parents for their children.

Agape love originates with God, for it is the basis for all of creation.

It is all in – no holds barred. Easter 3 C 3 10 April 20126 St. Peter York Acts 9:1-20; rev. 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Agape love is the highest form of love.

When Jesus tells us to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself,

It is agape love he is talking about.

It is love we learn from being loved by Jesus and then return to God with our whole lives.

We'll come back to this.

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If you were choosing someone for a very important job – someone you could trust with your life

Would you choose a murderer?

How about someone who betrayed you?

Or who abandoned you in a time of need?

Probably not, right?

But Jesus did.

He chose a Jesus hater, Saul of Tarsus, to be his personal representative to the highest authorities in the world.

Saul was a murderer of Jesus followers – seeking to round them up for destruction.

But Jesus had another kind of unity in mind. Easter 3 C 4 10 April 20126  
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Jesus had the unity of love in mind.

You see, Jesus already loved Saul – he had died for Saul.

And now he lived for Saul – Saul just didn't know it yet.

But he learned – in a dramatic way – that Jesus loved him so much as to have mercy on him.

Saul's blindness was God's way of helping him to see Jesus as his loving Savior.

This agape love of Jesus for Saul transformed him from a Jesus hater into a Jesus lover.

Instead of setting himself against those who followed Jesus, Saul now was baptized into their UNITY in the LOVE OF JESUS.

He now shared their faith and their purpose – to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God to all who would hear.

The UNITY in the LOVE OF JESUS that Saul now shared with the disciples defined his whole life from that point on and shaped the faith of the whole church. Easter 3 C 5 10 April 20126 St. Peter York Acts 9:1-20; rev. 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

UNITY IN THE LOVE OF JESUS is visible in specific ways:

- ☐ Those who share that unity gather together in community
- ☐ They eat together, pray together, sing together, work together
- ☐ They forgive one another as God has forgiven them
- ☐ They love one another as Jesus loved them
- ☐ They tell others about Jesus and his love for all people

So the Bible tells us that after Saul was baptized and could see clearly that Jesus is Lord and Savior of all,

He was with the disciples in Damascus and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues saying, "He is the Son of God."

Amazing!

Jesus' agape love for the likes of Saul means there is nothing about us to stop Jesus from choosing us for his mission.

When we experience the agape love of Jesus for us, we are united with all those whom Jesus loves.

We are made part of the family of God through baptism into his name.

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**Agape love seeks to give life to another, as Jesus gave his life for us.**

We see it at work again when Jesus fills the fishermen's nets with fish.

This was the same sort of compassion the disciples had seen with the loaves and fishes that fed the multitude, Easter 3 C 6 10 April 20126 St. Peter York Acts 9:1-20; rev. 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

and the water turned into wine at the wedding in Cana.

**They recognized the agape love of Jesus that brings life into a dying world.**

In his love he had provided for them in their livelihood and for their daily bread.

After they had finished eating, Jesus said to Peter – the one who 3 times had denied him.

Peter, Do you agape love me?

Peter said, “Yes Lord, you know that I filios love you.”

Did you hear that? Peter didn’t exactly answer his question.

It was kind of like girl asking boy – Do you love me? And boy answers, “Well, I like you a lot.” It’s not the same!

And yet, Jesus gives Peter an important, entrusted job:

Feed my lambs. – Give my people life!

A second time Jesus asked, Peter, do you agape love me?

and Peter again responded, “Yes, you are my friend.” and Jesus said “Tend my sheep” -- Keep them together as a flock, foster UNITY in MY LOVE

A third time – once for each of Peter’s denials – Jesus gave him the opportunity to avow his love and be reconciled.

But this time, Jesus changed his question – letting Peter know that in mercy, he accepted his imperfect love. Easter 3 C 7 10 April 20126 St. Peter York Acts 9:1-20; rev. 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Jesus asked, “Peter, do you filios love me?” Yes, Lord, I filios love you.

Feed my sheep. **Give my life to a dying world.**

Peter, who in mercy had been drawn into the UNITY OF the LOVE OF JESUS was now being called to share that love.

**To feed Jesus’ flock was to care for their life and salvation – to draw them into the unity of love.**

Even though Jesus spoke directly to Peter, the call to feed and tend the flock was meant for all of them.

**The very act of providing a meal creates unity**

- unity around the table,
- unity of purpose,
- unity of fellowship,
- unity of peace.

Here, In this community, Jesus feeds us  
with his Word,  
with his own Body and Blood,  
and with his mercy and grace.

Like Saul and Peter, **Jesus has chosen to agape love us** – and so shares his resurrection life with us.

Here, as he sets the table before us,

Jesus draws us into the unity of his love and transforms us into the community of those who share his love, **bringing others to life**. Easter 3  
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**When we know ourselves to be beloved of Jesus, we are eager to share his love with our entire life.**

For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!