

**Rev. Adrienne Meier**  
**May 9, 2021, Easter 6B**  
**Saint Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church**

**Series: Love: the Cure for Indifference**  
**Love is a Catalyst**

**1 John 5:1-6**

*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey God's commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey the commandments, which are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.*

Once, when she was interviewed about what urged her to refuse to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus, Rosa Parks said, "I will no longer act on the outside in a way that contradicts the truth that I hold deeply inside. I will no longer act as if I were less than the whole person I know myself inwardly to be." It was her love for herself that became the heart of not just her transformation, but the transformation of, what, our society? There is still so much work to be done, but we cannot deny that love—love for herself, love for humanity—love for black humanity, that they no longer be treated as anything less than fully human, love for white humanity, that they no longer suffer under the delusion of racism. Segregation - racism - survives on a farce that believes there is simply not enough to go around. That there's not enough freedom or jobs or money or safety or love to go around. In this economy of scarcity, love is treated like a currency doled out to the worthy, given to those who earn it. But, beloved, the love of God is not a currency. It is a catalyst.

Walter Wink was a biblical scholar in the last century. His work hinges on what he calls "the Powers" - the interlocking network of "political, economic, cultural, and ideological" power that has "turned their backs on their divine vocations and idolatrously set themselves up in defiance of God" and are maintained by violence of one kind or another. They exist is for self-preservation, and they keep their power by convincing everyone under them that the alternatives, which they claim are anarchy, chaos, and terrorism, these alternatives are so much worse. The ministry of Jesus was critical of the Powers. Wink argues that the word in the Bible for the Powers is *kosmos* - the world. Jesus preached against the *kosmos*, the world, by preaching about about the Kin-dom of God, a system built not on power and domination, but on something infinitely more powerful - love.

Now, Wink notes that the Powers use love, too. He writes, the Powers “require...people with low self-esteem who have given up on themselves. [They] need...people willing to spend a life-time working at routine, boring and meaningless jobs in order to survive. [They] convince...them from the cradle that they must validate their selves in order to win others’ respect and their own. In an economy of scarcity, love is dished out only to the worthy. Those who fail to receive love are taught to blame themselves for a situation that is systemic.” Think about it - how often do we try and find the people *worthy* of help, *worthy* of intervention, *worthy* of love. We are indifferent to the street panhandler, the food pantry client with the fancy car, or the person cleaning up after us at any number of establishments we are indifferent because we have deemed them unworthy. And when we do act, it is often because we feel that doing so will have some value to us—that we stand to gain from the interaction. This is so broken, we feel we can’t help or intervene or love all over the place because there is only *so much* to go around.

But the kin-dom of God, the love of God, isn’t something earned, like wages for a job well done. It isn’t a currency. It is a catalyst - it changes the world, transforms the world, conquers the world. So, I phoned a friend for this sermon. My sister, Valerie, is a chemical and environmental engineer. And so we had a very delightful debate about the right word here. I loved when she came up with the word catalyst - because, or course, the alliteration is lovely. Love is not a currency. It’s a catalyst. Perfect. (Chef’s kiss) We debated about reactants and reagents, but decided against them because while they are agents of change, they are consumed in the process. But a catalyst causes a reaction—a change—but it is not consumed by the process. Man, that’s love.

Love changes our world. Love changes us. Thomas Merton said, “Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business and, in fact, it is nobody’s business. What we are asked to do is love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy.” Love is the catalyst.

This kind of love stretches us. It requires us to see what we do not want to see. It requires us to feel what we do not want to feel. It requires us to risk what we do not wish to risk. Oscar Romero was Archbishop of El Salvador. He spoke out for social justice and against violence. He was a voice for the poor who were slaughtered in the violence leading up to and during the Salvadoran civil war. Time and again, he preached of God’s love, especially God’s love of the poor. The date he was martyred has been declared by the United Nations "International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims." He did not preach of the worthiness of the poor. He preached of love. He said, “Let us never tire of preaching love; it is the force that will overcome the world.”

And, so, beloved, here is the challenge in this week’s text, the spiritual discipline presented to us. That is to push back against our selves. Tied up in our concern of our neighbor’s worthiness is our own concern that we ourselves might be unworthy or that we

might become unworthy by working with the unworthy. We must remind ourselves that we are loved by God.

And in the same way our neighbor is loved by God. When what we hear in our head is suggesting someone, anyone is unworthy, we must challenge that idea. When we look away, the challenge is to turn back. When we say no, the challenge is to question why. Once, someone told me that many people think their first thought is simply who they are, but the reality is your first thought is what you have been trained to be. It isn't your first thought that matters, it is the next thought. Your first thought discounts someone, clutches your handbag tightly, judges hair, clothing, make up, cleanliness. It will take a long time to change that, but your second thought, that is where love can be the catalyst. You can change your own mind. You can love someone else for no reason other than they are loved by God.

Amen.