

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Apr 24th 2016

During my grade school years I loved being a Camp Fire Girl. The meetings, the field trips and the camping were all so much fun. And I'll always remember my 10th birthday when my dad, who collaborated with the local baker to design a cake with significance for each of our birthdays, surprised me at our troop meeting with my birthday cake in the shape of the Camp Fire logo. But I really enjoyed working my way through the Camp Fire handbook to explore topics and build skills. For every activity I would earn a colorful wooden bead. But it was the activity itself that had meaning to me: plan and host a child's birthday party, teach a young child about the solar system, help your family have a safety plan for a tornado. The possibilities seemed endless and I was always looking for the next opportunity to serve. My Camp Fire vest sporting a vast array of my earned beads hangs in my home office and brings back a flood of memories whenever I glance at it.

Today's gospel from John strikes me as the opposite of my Camp Fire Handbook in its simplicity. Jesus gives us one commandment: love one another. There it is. There is no need for multiple tabs and reference books. No need for strategy sessions. Or perhaps there is a need for a certain kind of strategy which is to be ever aware of God's love for us so we can love one another. Such a simple and such a demanding commandment.

Jesus goes on to say that having love for one another is how he will know who his disciples are. My understanding of discipleship continues to grow and in today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles we learn of Paul and Barnabas making a considerable number of disciples. They supported the disciples by reminding them to persevere in faith which can be very challenging at times. We all as disciples need to be reminded of the Lord's commandment: love one another as I have loved you. Listening for and appreciating the love of God allows us to live the commandment to love others.

So my prayer with today's readings calls me to discipleship and to a renewed commitment to follow the commandment to love one another. The responsibility of this commandment feels overwhelming. And then I realized I can learn from my Camp Fire Girl experience. I was able to thrive in those years because I was loved. I knew I was loved by my family and my friends. And because of that love I was able to love myself. I know now this love was (and is) a tremendous gift from God. The activities I selected from the Handbook were specific ways to show love for others: take a younger sibling to the library, write a letter to a grandparent, cook a meal for your family.

Today I am called to appreciate God's love for me and in that appreciation show love to others in simple and meaningful ways. A challenge I continually face is to stay in the present and meet others where they are. How can I really hear what someone is trying to say? How can I show patience for someone who is getting in the way of my goal? How can I help someone feel the ever present love of God? Sometimes showing love for another is so easy to do and sometimes it is the last thing I want to do. Being guided by the Lord's commandment to love one another as I have loved you is better than a vest filled with beads.