

Trinity Church
September 7, 2008

17 Pentecost
RCL, Year A, Proper 18

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

*Help us, Lord God, to put on our Lord, Jesus Christ, like a familiar garment; that filled with his love for you, we may show forth your glory.
Amen.*

In Romans 13, Paul goes on about how Divine love in us is the fulfilling of all that God desires for us; and he anxiously tells us that the end of all things is near, and that we should stop fooling around, and live honorably. Paul seems to find all these words inadequate to express what he really wants to say — so he finally shouts it out: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thank you, Paul, for speaking so clearly. For us Christians, Christ Jesus *is* what it’s all about. Jesus is not just part of what it’s all about; Jesus *is* what it’s all about. Being in Christ, with Christ, through Christ, is that for which our souls long. Our consuming desire is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and that deep consuming desire is what we call Love. Jesus says it in Matthew’s Gospel today. “Where two or three are gathered in my Name,” that is, gathered together in the common and consuming desire to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, “I am there,” Jesus says, “I am among them.” I am with them, in them, through them as a love so deep and complete that there is no distinction between us. We are one.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus says almost the same thing when in John 15 he talks about the vine and branches and uses the word “abide” over and over again. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” “Abide in my love.”

If Jesus is inviting us into himself, into his love for us; and if Paul is urging us so forcefully to accept this invitation and “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” then we should probably take a closer look at this love in which we are to dwell, to abide.

We usually think of love as an emotion, a feeling of affection and warmth that blossoms in fondness, caring, and concern. A feeling that varies in intensity, and which comes and goes, as all feelings do. This is a kind of love, but not the Love with a capital L that Jesus and Paul are inviting us to discover.

This Love with a capital L is none other than “God in us; our hope and glory.” This love is a driving, compelling, Spirit-driven force of desire to know and to be consumed by the Holy, to be entirely loved in Christ, and in Christ, to entirely love God, and to abide in God’s love for us.

We cannot put this love in our souls. This love is Christ in our souls, among us when we gather in his Name. This passionate longing dwells in every soul, waiting to be embraced. What Paul so eagerly desires is that we should open our souls to this love, and put it on as our own. This is what Thomas did when he finally saw the Risen Jesus. “My Lord and my God.” This was no mere profession of faith, it was a cry of love from the depth of his soul that was in him resurrection, life, and the true voice of eternal love given and received.

It is this burning love that we share here at Trinity Church. It is this burning love that binds every faith community together in mutual affection. When this love wells up in us, and overflows our hearts, it moves us to generous action to build communities of mutual affection and peace,

inviting Christ to be among us because we love in his Name. This generous love knows no boundaries, and holds nothing back from God. It is gracious, sensitive, and wise because it sees the image of God, the face of Christ, in every person. This absolute love is one with the Absolute Love of God. And it dwells among us here. It is the soul of our community.

I think this is what Jesus means by that troubling phrase, "Truly, I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven." What I think he means is that the binding love we have in Christ, the Holy Communion we share with him and with one another, is eternal, it spans the realities of heaven and earth, it is all-in-all, it is heaven to earth come down, it is all that we are, consumed now in resurrection and life.

So, to fall out of this love, to tear oneself away from God and from the Body of Christ that we are, is to lose on earth the gift of Divine Love that is in heaven. To fall out of love is to fall out of God, to put off the Lord Jesus Christ, and to embrace the cold darkness. Without love, the soul dies. Therefore, love one another with true affection, be reconciled to one another and live, be in Holy Communion and find peace.

Being in Christ is the heart and soul of what we must be about here at Trinity. It's not about the hymns we sing or the prayers we say, or the interesting programs, or what we do for others, or what we offer our youth and children. It is about the deep love of God we experience when we put on the Lord, Jesus Christ. Then whatever hymn we sing, or prayer we say, or class we give, or ministry we have, will be filled with the life-giving love of God in Christ, and will make for reconciliation and peace that passes all understanding.

The time is now, Paul says. Keep your hearts and minds and souls in the love of God. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.