**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

"I have called you friends." Authentic friendship can seem hard to come by these days, especially in our transient society. We move away from family, change jobs, switch parishes, and end up in entirely new places with entirely new people. When we look for new friends, we all have different qualities we're looking for.

While we may think of certain standards of behavior necessary to be a "good" friend, we would hardly refer to them as rules or "commandments." In fact, if a friendship or romantic relationship - new or old - becomes characterized by imposed obligations, we would rightly be suspicious. Friendships, we understand, ought to be characterized by freedom. We love the person, even sacrifice for them at times because, within ourselves, we want to maintain the friendship. So why does Jesus use the language of command as he calls the Apostles his friends? "You are my friends if you do what I command you.” Jesus is radically transforming the concept of commandment.

In the Jewish heritage of the Apostles, they would hear the word "command" and immediately think of the strict Levitical law and distance from God. In introducing the language of friendship, Jesus ties "commandment" to inner freedom of heart. The disciples have this freedom precisely because they know "what [the] Master is doing." Jesus has invited his followers into intimate friendship all along. He shares openly with them. He has patience with their flaws. He isn't scandalized by their failures. He celebrates their successes.

We, too, have been called by love and invited into a relationship with Jesus. It is you and I that Jesus chooses and appoints. He does so personally, not from a distant mountain shrouded in clouds. This "new commandment" to "love one another" is received around the shared table in the breaking of the bread.



Sometimes we minimize the power of love by cute pop songs and slogans that mean little without action. However, we can never underestimate the power of love. Love can tear down barriers between people, change tears to laughter, and mend relationships torn apart by sin.

No option exists for disciples of Jesus Christ to not love others. Not only are we commanded to do so, but love is a gift we must pass on freely. If we give of our time, talent, and treasure, but choose not to love, we cannot claim to be truly committed disciples and good stewards. As this Easter season draws ever closer to an end, we must allow our love to bear witness to the source of all love, the Risen Jesus.