

May 6, 2018 6th Sunday of Easter
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Acts 10:44-48, Psalm 98
1 John 5:1-6, John 15:9-17

(The Guardian and other press, on and around April 24, 2018, with quote from Scott Gilmore.)

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Nearly two weeks ago a neighborhood in north Toronto suffered a deadly van attack.

You've likely heard about this in the news.

I don't want to dwell on the details—it was a horrendous scene, from all accounts.

What I do want to dwell on is what happened afterward, when a Police officer, Constable Ken Lam, happened upon the one who had driven the van.

The suspect screamed and threatened, goading Constable Lam to shoot.

But Officer Lam didn't shoot

Instead he did just what he and his colleagues had trained, over and over, year after year, to do.

As the squad car sirens wailed, he walked back to the car and shut them off.

Even on these grainy videos things already feel calmer.

As the suspect's voice and actions escalated, Constable Lam steadily repeated the same order, over and over, de-escalating the situation.

Finally he made the arrest: The suspect was not hurt. Constable Lam was not hurt.

Let's be honest, this is not how it usually ends.

But this time, it de-escalated.

And that's what Constable Lam and his colleagues had practiced over and over again.

It worked. He did what he had trained to do. And it worked.

A columnist for Macleans, wrote, "I am paid to explain things and sound confident doing so.

But I honestly don't know what to make of this terrifying, remarkable moment."

This officer did what he had trained, over and over, to do. Just what he had practiced.

Our gospel reading today picks up where last Sunday's left off.

We're in the midst of chapters that are called Jesus' Farewell Discourse.

Jesus is nearing the cross and he knows it.

He's saying all those things you say, you teach, to those you love when you know you're going away.

Can you imagine what you might say in a time like that? What you might need to hear?

Verse after verse, through John's pen, Jesus reminds those terrified and confused disciples:

Abide in my love.

Remain in my love.

As *my* Father has loved me, that's the way I love you.

That's the way you can love each other.

Abide in this love.

Keep my commandments. Practice, practice, practice.

Constable Lam and his colleagues, they had practiced.

On that terrifying afternoon, in that north Toronto neighborhood, it worked.

We spend our lives practicing, often it works, sometimes we realize we need to practice a little more.

Not so long after today's gospel, when Jesus has duly offered his last words of wisdom, the scene changes.

We find Jesus and the disciples in the garden—this is that Holy Week garden,

where Judas brings the soldiers and officers in a moment of betrayal,

where Peter—ready to defend—pulls out his sword and nips off the ear of the slave.

All those chapters before, all those stories of ministry, all the healing, all the miracles, all through the farewell, Jesus has been coaching them.

Practice this love, abide in this love, practice it.

Remember how I am the vine, how you are the branches, practice it.

Remember your roots, remember the fruit, practice it.

Even as Peter escalates a little too much, Jesus calms him, calms the situation.

Practice, practice, practice.

I suppose this is the sermon we could preach every week, but the undercurrent of practice seems especially pronounced today.

That's what this Christian life is about: practicing this love, abiding in this love.

The last two days eight of us from Hope were at the Minneapolis Area Synod assembly.

Our congregation joins 146 other congregations to be the Minneapolis Area Synod.

From Isanti in the north, to Belle Plaine in the south, from Watertown on the west to Hope and Grace right here on the eastern edge by the U of M, we are the Minneapolis Area Synod.

And we are part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the ELCA.

And the ELCA is part of the Lutheran World Federation.

Our ELCA Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, joined us for this big church gathering.

Archbishop Musa Filibus from the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria spoke;

he's also the President of the Lutheran World Federation.

Over and over we heard stories, stories of ministries around the world and close to home practicing what it means to follow Jesus.

Pastor Kate [who is with us this morning] spoke about Lutheran Campus Ministry and the way it makes a space, a community for U students to be real, and to be curious, to practice living in the love of Jesus.

As Pomp and Circumstance rings out in graduation ceremonies around campus, the Campus Ministry students and thousands of others, hold, on the one hand, tremendous accomplishment—they've done it, and on the other hand, a lifetime of practice, with all its complexity.

Thank God, the Holy Spirit goes with us.

Today some of our middle school students have crafted our prayers [and are teaming up as the assisting ministers].

[Elementary age students are sharing with us the Lord's Prayer in American Sign Language].

I'm grateful they are taking this leadership, for in it they are practicing, like we all are, what it means to worship in Christian community.

Archbishop Filibus from Nigeria reminded us that young people aren't the church of the future, they are the future church right now.

In the middle of today's gospel, Jesus reminds those disciples, "No longer do I call you servants, but now I call you friends."

The power shifts and it's in this abiding, mutual love that we get to muck around, doing our best to serve and be served, to forgive and be forgiven, to love and to be loved.

Oh, it's messy, it's rocky.

There is much that needs mending, and we'll hurt one another without even trying, and sometimes we'll try to hurt one another, and it's terrifying...and it's gracious, and we try, we try, because Jesus calls us to abide and to practice.

Every six years we elect a bishop to lead our synod.

Yesterday we **re-elected** Ann Svennungsen as our synod's bishop.

In her remarks afterward, with all the emotion you can imagine, Bishop Ann said something like:

I hope you will hold me accountable, as well as pray for me, and share how you see the Spirit at work in this incredible love that knows no bound.

Today we baptize a beloved little one, Constance.

Constance's mom, Regina, and her family, her friends have been on a long journey.

Fertility struggles are part of their journey, like for so many of us.

As Constance is welcomed and prayed for today, we pray also for the babies before her, angel babies, her mom calls them.

Little ones that weren't able to survive, but also beloved, also prayed for, also held in gentle, loving arms.

The village, this congregation, family and friends, in our joy and in our grief, we abide together,

together upholding Regina and Constance in the promises of baptism,

together in Jesus love,

together practicing, always practicing, how best to care for each other,

how to meet one another in love, daring to reach out even when it is painful.

Abide in my love, Jesus says.

You did not choose me, but I chose you.

Abide always in my love.

Practice, dear ones, let us practice abiding in this incredible love that knows no bound.

Amen.