

Easter 3 – May 5, 2019 – Year C

*Acts 9:1-6, (7-20); Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19*  
*the Rev. Deborah Kempson-Thompson*

As her son was growing up,  
periodically  
his mother would ask him,  
“What is the most important part of the body?”  
He would say, “My ears, Mommy.”  
“No,” she’d answer,  
“Many people are deaf—  
and lead good lives.  
“Eyes?”  
“No. Many people are blind—  
and lead full lives”  
The year his grandfather died...  
Everybody was crying.  
Even his father cried.  
“Son, do you know the most important body part yet?”  
asked his mom.  
What a strange time to ask that question thought her son.  
“Today is the day you need to learn this important lesson.  
The most important body part is your shoulder.”  
“Because it holds up our heads?” her son queried.  
“No, because it can hold the head  
of friends or loved ones  
when they cry.  
I only hope that you have enough love  
and friends that you will  
always have a shoulder to cry on  
when you need it.”<sup>i</sup>

As good and heartwarming and

as affectionate friendship is,

additional kind of love is called for

in our scriptures today.

When Jesus asks Peter if the disciple loves him

more than his fisher friends,

Peter responds, *Philo se*, meaning

*“I have great affection and  
fondness for you, Master.”*

Jesus says,

*Teach the newest believers among you  
the truth of God’s love*

Peter, do you love me?

Peter answers again, “*philo se.*”

*Yes, you know how fond I am of you*

Jesus then says,

*make sure those among you  
who are easily led astray  
are encouraged by your example of  
loving others as I have loved you.*

During this exchange, the resurrected Jesus

is using the word *agape*—

meaning, *do you love me unconditionally?*

Peter is using the word for friendship.

Jesus is preparing Peter

to prefer a love deeper even than loyal friendship.

The Greek word *agape* denotes

*love which centers in moral preference.  
... in antiquity [the verb] meant "to prefer"  
In the New Testament  
(agápē) typically refers to divine love  
...what God prefers.*

To follow Jesus is

to prefer what God prefers.

Who are you, Lord?

I am Jesus, the incarnation of what God prefers for human beings—

I am the author of energy and liveliness.

I am Jesus who restores vitality to those

who are headed for eternal death.

I am Jesus who stops you on the road

to false goals, antagonism, and malice —

rescues and delivers you into loving relationships.

I am Jesus who takes the time to meet with you

who are discouraged and needy to say,

*Continue in following me  
and you will receive what you need.  
Joy will come in the morning.*

*Agape* is a direct response to God's love

with unconditional love for others.

The creation reflects God's love when

bearing new foliage, fruit, and grain after

enduring the hardships of every fall and winter.

Paul attests to *agape* upon his conversion—

falling to his knees in awe,

as do the angels and saints

and all the company of the heaven before

God Almighty,

as does the Psalmist,

*You have turned my wailing into dancing;  
you have put off my sack-cloth  
and clothed me with joy*

Three times Jesus asks Peter *agapas*—

Three times Peter answers,

*“You know I’m fond of you.”*

How often do we find ourselves in a similar conversation?

As yet, Peter doesn’t know or understand *agape*.

But, like us, he will as he continues to follow Jesus.

This conversation is only the beginning of his  
journey toward unconditional love.

Jesus wants Peter and us to grasp

that following Jesus leads,

beyond friendliness, affection, and convenience.

This deeper love, according to bible scholar Kenneth Wuest,

*“can be known only  
from the actions it prompts”<sup>ii</sup>*

*Agape* echoes the frustration of Eliza in the

film *My Fair Lady*

*Words! Words! Words...  
I get words all day through...  
Don't talk of June, Don't talk of fall!  
Don't talk at all! Show me!*<sup>iii</sup>

Following Jesus is to walk

more than to talk.

While *philio* – friendship—

is important,

it is neither as essential nor as empowering

as *agape*—

To mature Christians, as to Peter, Jesus says

*I am telling you the truth:  
when you were young, you used to get ready and  
go anywhere you wanted to;  
but when you are mature, you will stretch out your hands  
and someone else will lay claim to you and  
take you where you don't want to go.”*

Placing ourselves in this profound

state of understanding

that we are not our own but Christ's

begins the mature Christian walk.

St. Irenaeus declares,

*“to be alive consists in beholding God”<sup>iv</sup>*

Third Sunday in Easter  
May 5, 2019

We are called not to critique one another

but to accept and to serve one another.

What is the most important part of the Body of Christ?

The *agape* filled heart, mind, ears, eyes, hands, and feet.

*Amen*

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted in third person from <http://brosia.com/friendship-stories/anatomy-of-a-friendship/>

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>iii</sup> *My Fair Lady*, Broadway musical by Lerner & Lowe, <https://allmusicals.com/lyrics/myfairlady/showme.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> St. Irenaeus, Doctor of the Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE