

May 5, 2024 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

“The Four Seasons” by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: John 15:9-17

Every time I read this Gospel, my mind goes to Maundy Thursday, the time when we remember Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples, when he gave them his commandment to love one another as He had loved them.

To prepare the path for the main point of this message, I want to tell you the following story, a story I shared at Bible Study this week.

There was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn to not judge things too quickly. So he sent them each on a quest, in turn, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away. The first son went in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in summer, and the youngest son in the fall.

When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe what they had seen. The first son said that the tree was ugly, bent, and twisted. The second son said no – it was covered with green buds and full of promise. The third son disagreed and said it was laden with blossoms that smelled so sweet and looked so beautiful, it was the most graceful thing he had ever seen. The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfillment.

The man then explained to his sons that they were all right, because they had each seen but one season in the tree’s life. He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person, by only one season, and that the essence of who they are – and the pleasure, joy, and love that comes from that life – can only be measured at the end, when all the seasons are up.

Interesting how each of the four sons saw the pear tree differently, and all because they saw it at different seasons in its life.

This story is a good metaphor for each of us, because we all go through some changes, growth, challenges, hard times, great times, busy times and slow times or circumstances in our lives, but one season, one circumstance, cannot really or fully define who we are or tell the whole story about us.

And when it comes to judging others, let's remember that whatever is going on in the life of a person, it does not define the whole person.

I have brought up the subject of judgement because I believe it is one thing that prevents us from loving one another. The preconception of who the other is becomes a barrier that holds us back from loving them, from seeing them as our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

We talk a lot about judgement day, the day when our Lord Jesus will come in His glory to judge the living and the dead, the day when He will separate the sheep from the goats, the day when the chaff will go into the furnace of eternal fire and the wheat into granaries.

And I often wonder what would have happened to the fishermen if He hadn't called them to follow Him, to become his friends, and entrusted them with the entire plan for sharing His story with the world, His Gospel, His love. They were ordinary people, perhaps going through the winter season of their lives, without much to look forward to, no aspirations, no future,

Or what would have happened to Matthew, the tax collector, who was the subject of judgment for squeezing money out of people to give to the Romans and to himself? At the time the Lord Jesus met Matthew, he was in a kind of a winter season: there was no fruit, not even signs of new buds on the tree of his life. In the eyes of his community he was not a good man, he was an unlovable person. At that time the command to love one another as Jesus loves us, did not apply to him. Matthew had not yet known the love of God and the love of his fellow citizens.

And the same can be said for the rest of the twelve and for Mary Magdalene from whom he exorcised seven demons. Jesus met them all in a perennial winter season, and that didn't stop with the disciples. Jesus met so many others along the way, people who could not be loved but condemned and only judged.

But the power of the Gospel, the power of God's love and of the redeemer's light shone upon them all in the person of Jesus and changed them. I know this is not the first time that you hear me telling you that this is what the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is about.

When we look at the various people for whom the Lord Jesus turned their winter season into the seasons where their hopes and dreams were fulfilled, it fills us with hope too.

It is a great feeling to hear that we have a God who loves us despite our shortcomings, a God who can turn our darkest moments into moments of joy, a God who can renew our lives and take us to new horizons, new paths, new roads.

How many of us have had the hopeless feeling that things are not going to get any better, the thought that nobody loves us or that we are not worthy to be loved. At least the disciple Matthew and Mary Magdalene felt that way or perhaps all of the disciples did and see what they became.

They became people to whom the Lord Jesus said, “love one another as I have loved you”. See, the fellowship and ability to love one another among Christians begins with Jesus, begins with His love for us.

It is not so much our ability to love that will empower us to fulfill the Lord’s command to love others, it is the love of Jesus for us that will empower us to do so.

Without His love, we won’t be capable of loving those who are unlovable, are unworthy to be loved, those who cannot see themselves beyond the perennial winter season they are in.

The story of the pear tree and the four seasons I told you to begin this message concludes saying:

“If you give up when it’s winter, you will miss the promise of your spring, the beauty of your summer, fulfillment of your fall. Don’t let the pain of one season destroy the joy of all the rest.”

To paraphrase this ending of the story I would say that “If we give up on the love of Jesus for us, we will miss the promise of His love, we won’t be able to love others the way He loves us either and will be stuck in the deep mud and darkness and pain of the down times of our lives, incapable to see the joys of God’s promises for our future or future seasons of our lives.”

In the Lord’s prayer we ask God to forgive our trespasses as we forgive others who trespass against us. The forgiveness begins with God, we just follow. So it is with loving others; we love them because we who have no merit to be loved by Him are loved by Jesus first. **Amen.**