



# ST BART'S

A Sermon by

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## BeLoving and BeLoved

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, July 5, 2015  
The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost—Based on Mark 6:1-13*

As some of you know my husband, Victor, and I have been separated for a little more than a year, and it has not been an easy year for either of us. Trying not to hurt him and be supportive as my heart was breaking has been one of the most difficult challenges of my life, and I am here to say that I have not always done everything as well as I could have. When it was time for me to move out of our apartment earlier this year, I found an apartment here in midtown a few blocks east of the church. It was a little more money than I wanted to spend, and yet after five years of a 45-minute commute to and from work, I longed to be able to walk to work. I was afraid of making the wrong choice and almost didn't take it, but after some encouragement from Buddy and another friend, I gave in and the power of those loving relationships won out over my fear. It is a beautiful apartment, in a nice building, and it is certainly the best decision I have made in this last year.

In addition to being close to work, I do like having my own space. It has allowed me to listen to National Public Radio as I get ready in the morning in a way that sharing a space did not. I have discovered Krista Tippett and her excellent show *On Being*. Now many will say that my use of the word "discovery" to describe tuning into a radio program that has been mentioned in sermons and blogs written by the clergy of this church is a little like saying that Columbus discovered America.

Last week I tuned in as I was getting ready for church. Tippett was interviewing John A. Powell, a noted legal scholar who is the director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at the University of California at Berkeley. Powell believes that being human is about being in relationship. Being human is a process. It is not something we are just born with. If human beings are isolated, the negative health effects are worse than smoking, worse than obesity, and worse than high blood pressure. We need to be in relationship. Powell contends that race is about the human need to discover our connection and longing for relationship. For connection already exists. Relationship involves process.

Jesus understood the need to be in relationship. Asked to summarize the law, Jesus said to love God and love your neighbor. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it this way: "Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. The aftermath of the 'fight fire with fire' method which you suggest is bitterness and chaos; the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that. Yes, love—which means understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one's enemies—is the solution to the race problem." The Episcopal Diocese of Ohio made it into a bumper sticker: "Love God. Love your neighbor. Change the world. Love God. Love your neighbor. Change the world."

We know that love is powerful and yet we act as if anger is powerful and hate is powerful. We worry about anger and hate so much that we arm ourselves with the very guns that destroy our peace, our communities and our lives. And we are more afraid than ever. Afraid of those who are different from us, afraid of anger and afraid of hate. That fear, the same fear, is why divorce is so hard. Having found the power of love in a particular relationship, we are afraid of losing it. It is why we are so afraid of change in the church. The church is a place where we learned of the love of God, and if it changes we worry that we will lose it.

We need to discover the power of love. That is right: We don't need to find the power of love, for love is never lost. We do not need to learn about love, for love is never taught. Love is discovered in relationship to God and to our neighbor. We don't need to find love or learn about love; we need to discover the power of love in our own lives.

I could not have been prouder to be an Episcopalian this week. The first woman to be elected as Presiding Bishop celebrated the election of her successor an African American man, and the convention voted to allow same sex couples to marry in the church. In discovering the power of love and granting church members who are women, people of color, and the LGBT members full rights and responsibilities of membership, the Church has discovered itself a beloved community. A community where all people can be be-loved and be-loving.

And yet there is so much more to be done. What more you ask? After all, the Church did so well last week. We have proven that we can allow women and African American members to lead us. We have allowed the love that dare not speak its name to speak, and we have listened. What is missing? Do we still need to do more? Of course we do! In fact our work has not yet begun. Remember that Archbishop William Temple taught us, "The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members." Our job is not to preach to the converted, and it is certainly not to preach to the unconverted, but rather to discover God's love and God's longing in the world.

That is why Jesus called his disciples together and sent "them out two by two," ordering "them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics."

Notice that Jesus does not send his disciples out alone but in relationship, in pairs. In pairs like the animals leaving the safety of the ark after the flood we are called to go out from the beloved community into the world that is longing for justice, for relationship and for love. Secondly, notice that the disciples are to take no baggage. Without the baggage of sin and preconception and without resources, the disciples are to engage people on their own turf and on their own terms. Not telling them what they should do in order to be saved but rather learning from them what it is to be longing. In their longing the disciples discover the longing of God.

I say that there is so much more to be done because there are many people of all races, there are men and women, and straight and gay people who have not heard the call to be loving and be loved. Their experience of the world and the church has not left them loved but longing. They long for justice, for relationship, and for love; and in their longing they are like God, who longs for justice, for relationship, and for love. Like the disciples we are sent into the world without the baggage of sin and preconception, without resources; and we are called to be in relationship with the world on the world's turf and on the world's terms, and we will discover the longing and the love of God.

It is not by learning more about the world that we will transform the world, but rather by being in relationship that we are transformed by the world, and by being in relationship we will transform the world. That is the place where the segregationists and the Nazis, the sexists and the homophobes were right. They understood that if you could only keep the races apart, keep women in their place, and make sure that same-sex love dare never speak its name, things could maybe stay the same. And they understood that if relationships were allowed to form across the lines that they used to divide us, the world would be transformed and we would never be the same again!

As Presiding Bishop-elect Michael Curry reminded the General Convention, "Just because God loves us the way we are does not mean God wants us to stay the way we are." God is not finished with us and God is not finished with the world.

We know that the power of love, the power of God, is calling us to transform the world. The power for transformation is in the longing and loving of God. We are called to be longing and we are called to be loving. And when we are longing and loving, we discover that we belong and we are beloved. And then we are sent out all over again to be longing and be loving, and so it is and will be until the end of the ages.