

## Sunday Sermon May 10, 2026

It was a beautiful spring day, 17 years ago. Bright sunlight shined through the window of my mother's room at the care center. She was sitting up in the bed, sporting a cheerful headscarf and looking a little bit grey, but she had a twinkle in her eye and a smile on her face.

I think she was smiling because her 5 children were all sitting around her bed. But the smile was surprising because she had gathered us together to tell us she was dying.

The tumor in her brain had grown back. She was choosing not to do any more surgery or chemotherapy or radiation. She had gathered us together to give us this news and to tell us some things that were on her mind and heart. Important things...

I remembered this day with my mother vividly as I reflected on today's Gospel passage: a part of Jesus' Farewell Discourse. Jesus delivers it during the Last Supper in John's Gospel.

Gathered at table with his disciples, Jesus knows he will be with them in his physical form only a little while longer, and so He wants to say good-bye to his beloved friends and to tell them some important things... life-changing, world-changing things.

"I will be with you only a little while longer in this physical body," Jesus says, "but I will remain with you forever. I will live in you forever, in my love. In my love which will be poured out upon you in the gift of the Holy Spirit. My love will never die. It will live on in you and be made known through you when you love one another as I have loved you.

As I listened to my mom on that bright spring day all those years ago, I heard her say some very similar things. As she prepared for the death of her body, she told us how much she loved us. That love was always there, and it would never die.

Now the 5 of us knew, full well, that we had disappointed her along the way. We had made choices she did not approve of, but she loved us in spite of those things,

because her love was unconditional. Her love was bigger and more powerful than anything we might have said or done wrong along the way.

I am always struck by the first line of today's Gospel, verse 15, where Jesus says: "if you love me, you will keep my commandments." Note: Jesus doesn't say: "If you keep my commandments, I will love you." No- this is seeing the keeping of commandments as a threat and God's love as a reward for obedience, but Jesus frames keeping the commandments as the response to God's love. The response to unconditional love is to live loving lives...

Having been loved unconditionally by God, we respond with how we live: By showing compassion and mercy, caring for others, respecting, loving in all we say and do. Jesus is making it clear that His love is not a reward for having lived a perfect life, rather His love is a gift that inspires us to love fearlessly all along the way.

Reflecting on the love revealed in Jesus' Farewell Discourse, Nancy Ramsay says: "The love that Jesus wants his hearers to embrace is not an abstract philosophical concept but the lived reality revealed in the life, relationships and actions of a simple Nazarene who looks and talks like them and lives simply among them. He feeds the hungry, touches lepers, heals the sick, and speaks and acts toward women with care and regard. Love is seen in his life as service and compassion. It is also seen in his fierce protests against those who abuse this vision of the value of each person and the importance of an ethic of mutual regard and care. Instead of power as domination, Jesus invites those who meet him to imagine power that has as its goal the well-being of all persons regardless of social status."

She speaks well there to the power of love over force and domination. "My love will live on in you" Jesus says "and it will show in how you treat one another."

It was clear at her bedside those many years ago that my mother just wanted us to know how much she loved us, and how much she wanted us to love one another and to take care of our father. And the mystery that she was revealing is that she would live on in that love.

Jesus is saying something very similar in his words of farewell to his disciples: "I will live on." "I will live on in and through you in your love for each other and for the world." I will never die, Jesus says, because love never dies...

I hope that you have known this kind of love in your life. I hope that you have had a mother, or a mother-figure, a partner, a spouse, a friend, who has loved you unconditionally and given you a taste of God's love. For that is life's greatest gift.

But even if that has not been your experience, I pray that you will know the love of God in Jesus through the love of His followers. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we seek to embody, to put flesh on God's love.

Do we do that perfectly? Heaven's no! No family is perfect, but I believe that even our flawed efforts are pleasing to God and that God works through them, works through us, imperfect, flawed followers.

May we always be grateful for Jesus, love in the flesh, and for those we have known who have put flesh on God's love and made it real, and in doing so have inspired us to do the same.

Alleluia, Amen