

*“United in the Spirit and Love!”*

With today being **Pentecost – the Birthday of the Church** – when the disciples received the Gift of the Holy Spirit and with this Sunday being **Personal Dedication Sunday**, focusing on the Holy Spirit and the gifts we have received from God through the Spirit these make our Scripture very appropriate! In addition to the obvious, the Reading demonstrates how important Jesus’ disciples were to him, as were and are all of his followers – the believers. This is because – even though Jesus knew it was his last night as a mortal man and he was painfully aware he would be betrayed, deserted, and put to death, he, nevertheless, put **his focus on the well-being of his disciples and how they and we are enabled to remain in our special relationship with him**. Along with the Gift of the Holy Spirit and our gifts, which we receive through the Spirit, this Pentecost and Personal Dedication Sunday emphasize the role of Jesus’ call for us to “agape love one another” in fulfillment of Christ’s purpose for our lives and the deepening of our Faith Relationship with him, as well as, in having greater unity with all of the Christian Community – the Body of Christ.

For example, in **verse 15 Jesus said to his disciples, “If you love me, you will obey my commandments.”** He elaborated on what he meant in **verse 21, “Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. My Father will love those who love me; I too will love them and reveal myself to them.”** Jesus’ message revealed the nature of his followers’ relationship with him and God is one of love.

The Greek term used in the Gospel of John for this love is “*agape*”. It is a **self-giving and sacrificial love**. It is the same love Jesus understood he was sent to be the expression of — **God’s Self-giving and Suffering Agape Love** for humanity. It is helpful for us to remember Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus about God’s Love for us, when the two of them met under the cover of darkness. During their conversation, Jesus told Nicodemus **in John 3:16-17, “For God loved the world so much that He gave His Only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”**

The disciples came to understand Jesus affirmed their appropriate agape loving response toward him was to obey his commandments. When one accepts and obeys his commandments – agape loves, then Jesus reveals himself to us. It is as we perceive this agape nature of Jesus, that we are, further, made aware of the Divine Parent’s Agape Love for us.

Earlier that same evening, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. He said in **John 13:14, “I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another’s feet.”** Jesus called them and us to serve one another. Jesus also said in **John 13:34-35, “And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”** Not only, is our “love for one another” to demonstrate to everyone we belong to Jesus, further, his example of self-giving and sacrificial agape love in his suffering death is exactly the type of love we who belong to Jesus are to live out!

The Gospel of John does not report Jesus giving other “commandments”. Over and against the legalism of the religious authorities, Jesus did not exclude persons — even when someone pointed out their sins. Addressing this, **Jesus said in John 6:37b, “I will never turn away anyone who comes to me”**. It might be helpful to understand Jesus was reclaiming and redefining the word, “Commandments” in stark contrast to the enormous multitude of commandments of which the Religious Authorities demanded adherence.

Jesus promised in verses 16-17, “another Helper” for those who agape love him — those who obey his commandments. **Jesus said in verses 16-17, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the Truth about God. The world cannot receive him (the Holy Spirit), because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you.”** All who agape love Jesus — obey his commandments to Love and Serve one another are promised to receive this Helper, the Holy Spirit.

Considering the rich diversity among Christian churches, this Text reminds us of our identity, calling us to show

our love for Jesus Christ by obeying his commandments to agape love and serve one another, just as he has done so for us. **It would be wonderful, if all professing Christians would unite in fulfilling the commandment to agape love one another, instead of seeking to exclude some people! It would be great, if we followed his example of welcoming everyone!**

Our unity is also manifested in our having the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the Spirit gifts us all with abilities to love and serve one another! **On this Pentecost and Personal Dedication Sunday, it is crucial for us to recognize we show we are united in the Spirit and in God's Agape Love, in large part, by using those gifts for our Divine Parent's service and the unity and well-being of the Community of Believers.** We are, indeed, united in the Spirit and in Agape Love. Amen.

## **PERSONAL DEDICATION PROCESS**

As we come to the high point of our Personal Dedication Program, you are invited to complete your **Personal Dedication Booklet** and then bring it forward to the Altar for Dedication and Consecration. If you don't have a Personal Dedication Booklet, please hold up your hand and someone will get a copy to you. By completing our Personal Dedication Booklets and presenting them for Dedication, you and I make our New Lives in Christ and our commitment to follow his example of service a significant part of our obeying Jesus' commandment to agape love one another! We commit to how we will use God's Spirit given Gifts in each of us as a manifestation of our deep Love for and Faith Relationship with God's Only Son, Jesus the Christ.

Please look at your Personal Dedication Booklet. There are brief explanations beneath some of the items listed in the booklets, especially with reference to serving in elected positions. Clarifying those tasks, hopefully, eliminates the fear of the unknown, which otherwise, might lead us to raise barriers against serving in those ways. All of the ministries of Round Grove United Church need the commitment of time, skills, and energy. Please take each of those ministry opportunities seriously and place a check or X in the blank to the left of each opportunity for which you are willing to **follow Jesus' example of self-giving and sacrificial service and love.**

Christian Community Action's Kids Eat Free Program this year will begin a little earlier each day – at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, when we need volunteers to help assemble lunches and then for some to deliver those lunches to a site in Sycamore Park for distributing the lunches to children in need for about 15 minutes. Phyllis and Shane Murphy will be helping me provide much of the Leadership for this year's Kids Eat Free Program. On the back page of your booklet – a little more than half way down, you will find the tasks for the Kids Eat Free Program, as well as on the yellow Kids Eat Free insert in your bulletin.

Other critical needs, for which you may allow the Spirit's gifts in you to be demonstrated is joining the group of members, who take turns preparing and then showing the PowerPoint Presentations for our Worship Celebrations, and/or being a Lay Liturgical Leader, who from time to time helps lead our Worship Celebrations, and/or Teaching our Children in Sunday School.

Jesus Christ calls you and me to respond to his sacrificial love and example, as **a matter of obedience and agape love**, which is set on fire by and enabled by God's Holy Spirit burning with the Spirit given gifts. Living this way, we live with our Risen Lord and our Divine Parent! Being so **transformed – with hearts aflame** – let us earnestly seek to manifest **God's Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love** in the committed ways we utilize our Spirit given gifts!

**As Michael shares some of his Time, Talent, and Energy for God's Purposes and our Worship Celebration, please complete your Personal Dedication Booklet and then, after I invite the ingathering, bring it forward to the Altar for Dedication and Consecration. It is a matter of answering Jesus' call with agape love and our gifts of the Spirit! Let Our Light Shine! Amen.**