

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

And welcome to morning prayers. Today's service will begin with a reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, Psalm number 116, found on page 58. Please stand as you are able, as we read by whole verse.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.

Congregation:

Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me. I found trouble and sorrow.

Congregation:

Then called I upon the name of the Lord. Oh Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous. Ye, our God is merciful

Congregation:

The Lord preserveth the simple. I was brought low, and he helped me.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

I said in my haste, all men are liars.

Congregation:

What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits toward me?

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.

Congregation:

I will pay my vows unto the Lord now, in the presence of all his people.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

I will offer to be the sacrifice of Thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the Lord.

Congregation:

I will pay my vows unto the Lord now, in the presence of all his people.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye, the Lord.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

Our lesson for today comes from the Gospel according to John.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you also should love one another. And by this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another... if you have love for one another.

Over the past few years, my husband and I have watched all of the documentary films nominated for an Academy Award. I don't remember how this family tradition started, but it has become a much beloved one in the doldrums of winter. And this year we watched one called Paper & Glue, about an artist, JR, who constructs large, striking black and white photos on walls and buildings. He sees the world as his canvas.

Growing up in an immigrant family on the outskirts of Paris, his first foray into art was graffiti. And the documentary opens at the U.S Mexico border. JR and his team have constructed a three story billboard that looms over the wall separating the two new countries.

It is a picture of a toddler with a huge inviting smile, who seems to be peering over the wall from the Mexican side into the U.S side. The photo of the child is one who he met on the Mexican side of the border with his family. And that toothy smile grin of the kid is a stark contrast to the steel beams of the wall. As the mother of the child said, "JR is giving face to what many distort."

JR and his team were surprised that no one stopped him from building the billboard, took them a few weeks. A few American patrol officers came to watch the construction, and once it was built JR said, "That was pretty much what I had in mind." He shared its location on social media and hoped that people would go see it. But he did not expect what happened next. People came on both sides. They began talking to one another, asking, "Hey, how are you?" They exchange phones to take photos of one another. No patrol officers came. No one was arrested for three weeks.

And one month in, JR and his team invited people to come see the kid one last time. They wanted to organize a dinner with a spread and table that would go through the wall, 30 feet on each side. A few

days before the dinner, they got a letter from the American Border Patrol stating that they would strongly recommend that the table only be built on the Mexican side. So they constructed the table on the Mexican side, and people came and started to sit and come and eat and enjoy one another's company.

And after an hour, or about an hour and a half, 20 or 30 people began to gather on the U.S side. JR, who was on the Mexican side, actually passed them a tarp through the fence. Everyone kept thinking, "Oh, we only have a few minutes before this party is broken up." But then another hour passes and a music band actually sets up on both sides of the wall and begins playing. Now the tablecloth that was used on both sides of the fence had a silk screen print of a woman's eyes. One eye on each side, the eyes are of a dreamer named Myra. And she actually came to the party with her mother.

Now another hour and a half passes, and a patrol officer finally comes. He's actually been surveilling the party, and decided to let it happen. In fact, he has come to join the party. And he ended up chatting with Myra sharing that he also had family on the other side. JR recounts, art can go places beyond rules, beyond borders.

Today is Maundy Thursday, the day that we mark the last supper that Jesus would share with his friends. And the day that he would give us the most sacred of commandments. I give you a new commandment that you love one another Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this, everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

When rereading John's account of the Last Supper in anticipation of today, I noticed something for the first time. Jesus shows what love looks like, and then he gives the commandment. As if to say to us, anyone can tell you to love but let me show you first, then you will truly understand. What is easier? To say love one another, or actually love, and say love as I have loved you?

Writer Priya Parker observes, "The way we gather matters. Gatherings consume our days and help determine the kind of world we will live. Gatherings shape the way we think, and feel, and make sense of the world." I would add that how we gather can also be a way of professing how we want the world to be. We might not be there yet, but it's a way that we can embody the way we want to live. Or better yet, the way that Christ shows us how to live.

Will you pray with me?

Dear God, out of your love you have provided us with more than we could possibly need. May we build longer tables and not higher fences. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

And will you join me in reciting the Lord's prayer?

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

Our father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses. As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

Please stand as you are able to sing the hymn, My Song Is Love Unknown. Hymn number 150.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

As we go into this day, may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. And may the Lord grant you peace.

And the gathered people said, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.