As some of you know I love to garden. I also love the sound of water. A few years ago I decided to put these together by following the directions in one of those gardening magazines to make a fountain. I carefully gathered all my supplies - pot, pump, tubing, stones, assembled them as directed and added water. Then I turned on the pump. Water shot out Overflowing exuberantly Far beyond the confines of the little pot where I intended it to splash and circulate gently. It would not be contained.

Much like Jesus’ love. In today’s gospel Jesus commands the disciples to love one another “Just as” he has loved them. That little phrase, “just as” is the key to the whole passage. What does “just as” love look like?

To answer that we need to back up and take a look at what’s happening here. This gospel passage comes at the end of the last supper, near the beginning of the farewell discourses.

These are long passages where Jesus explains everything he has done and taught to his disciples, trying to get them ready for what is coming - his departure, and death.

The new commandment – to love one another just as Jesus has loved us is familiar to us all. It’s so familiar it’s easy to let these words glide right over us without making much of a difference.

We think we already know what they mean. Love one another. We got this. Or do we?

Love after all is not easy as any of us who have lived in a family as parent, sibling, or child can testify. Love requires us to do things, things we often wouldn’t choose for ourselves.
Love demands that we stretch ourselves  
Love requires patience and forgiveness and understanding far beyond what any of us can really accomplish on our own.

Beyond that, as Jesus’ disciples we are commanded to a particular kind of love,  
We’re commanded to love just as Jesus loved us.

Jesus’ love, in the fourth gospel, was intimately connected with abiding in the Father’s love  
With doing the Father’s will

To love as Jesus means loving without counting the cost for ourselves  
Loving to the point of death

To love as Jesus means to be part of a chain of love that extends from the Father, the Creator of all, to Jesus to his disciples and out into the world.

There’s a problem with how love gets defined in the fourth gospel. As Dean Richardson reminded us last week, the fourth gospel was shaped by the experiences of the Johannine community.

It was written about 90 CE for a community of Jewish Christians and Gentile converts who had experienced persecution and division from many directions. Some of them had been kicked out of the synagogue for believing in Jesus. Some members disagreed about what beliefs about Jesus, sin and forgiveness were correct. This was not unusual in the early Church. As we see in our first reading, conflict and division about beliefs and practices, differing ideas about what someone had to do or think to be a Christian happened regularly.

Preaching the gospel and the movement of the Spirit kept pushing the boundaries the early Christians were used to.

That’s the problem with how we typically read this new commandment to love. It’s so shaped by the conflicts of the Johannine community that we hear “love one another” and we think we get to stop at the bounds of the Christian community.

We don’t.
The members of the Johannine community needed to hear that good news, to be challenged to love just as Jesus loved, in union with God who is the source of all life, with the Son and the Spirit. They needed to move beyond their fears and divisions to a self-giving love that extended even to those with whom they disagreed.

This gospel is the good news for us here and now. Today we are the disciples whom Jesus commands, Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

We live in a world filled with prejudice, bigotry and hatred, where people are vilified and all too often injured verbally, emotionally and physically because they are different. We cannot afford to think in terms of insiders and outsiders. We cannot limit love to our siblings in Christ.

Today’s good news insists that we move from self-giving love enclosed in the bounds of our community, to a love that knows no limits. Much like my homemade fountain, our love cannot be contained in the walls of this church or in the relationships that make up the fabric of Trinity Cathedral. Like Peter, the Spirit impels us beyond the boundaries of those we recognize as like us to those who seem strange, different or even “wrong” to us.

Love in John’s gospel is self-giving and abundant: The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep Jesus lays down his life for his friends Love overflows Love gives new life

Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit we are sent into the world to love as Jesus did. We are commanded and empowered to love,
not by our own strength but by abiding in the One who loved us, becoming branches of Jesus the Vine remaining in his love and drawing strength from him, just as he remained in the Father’s love.

Self-giving, generous love naturally flows outward Jesus promises that if we love one another as he has loved us our love will bear fruit, will overflow abundantly, bringing new life to the world. (15:12, 16-17)

That is my wish for all of you You loving, generous people who have welcomed me into the midst of this community of disciples, not so unlike that of the early church with varying opinions and questions Striving valiantly to love one another and to let your love overflow for the transformation of our world.

I can think of no better prayer for you than that of Paul for the believers in Ephesus: that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are rooted and grounded in love. you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

From God’s fullness may your love overflow As the Spirit enables you to love Just as Jesus loved.

- Karen Lawler, OEF