

The Very Rev. Cynthia Byers Walter

**LOVE LIVES**  
*Sermon for Pentecost 23A—Mt25:14-30*  
LPC, 11/16/14

I had a sermon all prepared for this Sunday, but I didn't like it. It was theologically sound, and suitably expository of the Gospel reading for today, but it didn't move me. As a preacher I don't think I can move other people if I'm not myself moved in some way.

And then I saw a couple of things that did move me. These were both videos that friends had shared on Facebook, and I'd like to tell you about them, although I'll warn you ahead of time that they're both a little hard to take.

The first video was taken by a camera mounted on the helmet of a firefighter. The camera shows his point of view as he enters a burning house and finds an unconscious kitten on the floor. He takes the kitten outside, administers oxygen, washes the kitten and it revives. That's where the video ends, but evidently that's not where the story ended. Subsequent Facebook posts reveal that the kitten later died. Evidently its tiny lungs had just been too damaged. The distributor of the video was contacted and invited to withdraw the video under the circumstances, but the distributor wanted the video to stand because it still showed the compassion and dedication of the firefighter, and that was a worthwhile thing.

That was sad enough, but the second video is even more difficult. It shows a musician whose wife has just died in childbirth singing to their baby, who is also dying, accompanying himself on the guitar. This one I could not watch to the end.

I am not only moved by the upsurge of emotion these videos elicit, but I am moved to offer a Christian perspective. I would like to suggest that even though both movies are profoundly sad, they both demonstrate a Christian truth. I'm struggling to articulate this truth, and here is as far as I've gotten. Death is real, but love is stronger. The ultimate question for Christianity is not, "Did they live?" but "Was there love?"

This gets complicated because it's precisely because there was love that the situations seem so desperately tragic. But the fact remains that Christianity, following Christ, places a higher value on love than even life itself.

On the one hand, there's good reason for this. Life dies. It is in the nature of individual biological life to have a term. Whereas love never ends.

With a natural inner wisdom, we know this. At a funeral we measure a life not by its longevity but by the love it engendered.

We don't always live as if we value love most of all. We value stuff and money and accomplishment in our lives, sometimes at the expense of love.

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Even as a church community our priorities can be skewed in favor of things that can be quantified: the number of members, or attendance, or the size of our budget, or our survival in years, rather than our love.

But our highest priority, if we are to be true to our calling as followers of Jesus, must be love, and how can we teach love, where true life, eternal life, abundant life, lies.

Numbers, I daresay, will take care of themselves, if we as church fulfill our call to love.

All living things die. Eventually each of us will die, no matter what we do. Eventually, even Lawrencefield Church will die, though may that day be far off. But our love will endure.

Our task must be how to love, how best to love, how to love well. Or, in the words of Mother Theresa of Calcutta, how to do small things with great love.

Now, let me relate this message to the gospel lesson. Ostensibly this is a story of people making fantastic returns on their investments. Those of us who are fortunate enough to have portfolios would probably like to know what the first two servants invested in, that they were able, in short order, to double their investments.

But as usual, we humans tend to focus on the human role in such parables, rather than God's role. In the story, the treasure with which each servant is entrusted is meant to signify the love of God. It is in the nature of God's love to grow, compound, even double. The only way to stop God's love from growing is to bury it. The experience of the third servant shows us that an emphasis on mere preservation is no life at all, while a life of love compounds and grows beyond imagining.

Left to itself however, love will find a way. Love not only survives but multiplies. Love doubles, or triples, or grows six, ten or a hundred fold. We have only to let it go, and flow, and grow. Love lives.