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“Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” In the name of One God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We humans are obsessed with love. It inspires, and sells, our art; it structures our societies, shapes our values; and, as those of us who gathered to witness, bless, and affirm at Mac and Nigel’s joyful wedding yesterday morning saw first-hand, it draws people together into something new, something brave and delightful and risky; it reaches for the other, it creates new relationships, it transcends the sum of its parts. And, as our community will witness next Saturday at the funeral of Nate Pierce, a beloved parishioner, it draws people together to mourn, remember, and celebrate a life well-lived, a life that is witness to life beyond death.

Love is clearly fundamental to human life – its beginnings and endings; its joys and sorrows. Even when hatred and fear seem to tear our societies at the seams, love keeps us showing up, speaking up. Because love is not just the spectacular shows of bravery or sacrifice. Love is often most evident in the ordinary, quiet good of faithful relationships, humble service, persistent calls for justice.

If human beings as a whole can be said to be obsessed with Love, Christians are especially so. For us, Love is a creative force, a tender presence, a man named Jesus who lived, and died, for his friends. Love is our advocate and guide; the author of our salvation. Love is our mission, our roadmap to abundant life, for life beyond death, for a horizon of peace and mutual flourishing.

In our lesson from Exodus, we hear God’s covenant with God’s chosen people on the eve of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The assembly, the household of Israel, is to enter into a new covenant, echoing the divine promises made to their ancestors. And this covenant, as with the ones which have come before, will be sealed in blood. For it is by blood that they will be reborn into a new life with God and each other.

In the Law given through Moses to the people following their deliverance, blood is not only a sacred sign of life – it is life. And this life is required for purification, for reconciliation, for renewal. For the

people of Israel, blood was a common reminder of the gift of life, the cost of love, of *hesed*, God's covenantal love and loyalty, of self-giving Love.

And blood is an essential part of the new covenant that God has made in Godself, in the person of Jesus Christ, who is Love in human likeness. It is the blood of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross that now purifies, reconciles, and renews, forming us into a new assembly, a people of God drawn together from all tribes, nations, and walks of life to be the Body and the Blood, to be the Word of Life, to be living witnesses to the Love that is God, the creative force in the universe from which all life flows. In other words, the Blood forms us into the Church.

The Apostle Paul, one of the first living witnesses to our faith in eternal, self-giving Love, declares, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." No other measure is needed, Paul declares, for atonement, for our becoming one with God and God's creation, but the blood of Jesus, the new life that he offers freely from himself. And the substance of that new life? Love.

To live in this Love is perfect freedom, the freedom to be fully known and embraced as our truest selves before God and one another. It is to receive, again and again, the new life that Jesus offers us, free of fear, free of death. But this Love, this Love, which creates a community of peace, joy, and mutual flourishing has a cost – a cost of overcoming the pain of human sin – a cost that is joyfully taken on by God into God's own self.

To participate in this community of Love, to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus in loving trust, is to join with the apostles like Paul and become a living witness to that same Love as we take on the "Lord Jesus Christ." Rooted and grounded each Sunday at the Eucharist in the mystical Body of Jesus, the Church, we must then go out as the Church to face the difficult, necessary, daily work of ordinary human love: we must reckon with our own distorted desires, repenting and returning to right relationship; we must approach our differences and disagreements with the same grace and humility that Jesus modeled in his faithful life and death; and we must name the places where fear, anxiety, the desire for control, evil, and despair erode our love for another. To receive Jesus' Blood in faith, then, is to embody that same self-giving Love in our own lives through our actions, words, relationships, and values, as it is through grace alone we stand with boldness before God and each other, redeemed, reconciled, renewed: a living Sacrament for the world God has made. Amen.