

## LOVE ONE ANOTHER WITHOUT DISTINCTION

Father Spencer

Eastertide 2025

5/17/2025, 5 pm, Vespers & 5/18/2025, 9 am, Sunday



Abraham Lincoln, elected presidential candidate  
for the Republican Party on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1860,  
with Edwin Stanton, Secretary of War

***“Love one another.” — John, 13:34***

**Love one another** Jesus says on his way to the garden of Gethsemane today. The word “love” appears in the Gospel of John on every page like breadcrumbs guiding us to the garden. If love is the seed of Jesus, if love is the tool of Jesus, if love is the flower of Jesus, if love is the Gettysburg Address of Jesus, if Jesus sounds like Siri today repeating the directions to our success, will we follow Jesus? To what end? If Jesus is our flower child standing barefoot in the center of the Bible, will we want to turn St. Paul’s Episcopal Church into a Wickford Woodstock?

Jesus invites us to a love-in. In the spring of 1970, around this time of year, Joni Mitchell wrote: “We’ve got to try to get ourselves back to the garden.” She was thinking about Woodstock and beseeching us to **love one another**. When Jesus gets to the garden after today’s passage he will accept his responsibility. He will come into the light. He will have traveled far with a life devoted to not taking things personally. That is his kingdom and the kingdom came.

Last week I spoke of getting up. Last week you all stood up one by one like a wild altar call. The kingdom was coming. Like you were at a rock concert. So we’re up now. So now what? What to do once we’re up? This past Monday, I visited Carol Eustis, a member of our church at Roberts’ Rehabilitation Center. Recovering from a hip replacement, I brought Carol tulips, I brought the garden to her. Carol Eustis got up and smiled in her room like Joni Mitchell, a hippie with a new hip.

I asked Carol: “What does it mean to ‘love one another?’” Carol paused and said, “It means **to love one another without distinction.**” Carol sounded like Cardinal Robert Prevost who said: “Jesus doesn’t ask us to rank our loves.” Carol was The Book of Acts today where the Spirit tells Peter **to make no distinction** in his love. The same word Carol used. Carol grew as tall as Abraham Lincoln. Jesus’ love campaign won’t work if distinctions are made. **Love one another**

**without distinction.** Love without limits. Jesus governs a cabinet without a hierarchy. No favorites in Gethsemane. Jesus **loves without distinction.**

Jesus doesn't number, rank, judge, categorize, label, separate, qualify, pressure love. Jesus spreads love like fertilizer. Jesus doesn't react to the people that criticize him. Jesus' power of love trumps his love of power. Before Woodstock and the 1960s, there was another man among us who **loved without distinction** and did not take things personally and was a child of flower power.

On this Sunday, May 18<sup>th</sup>, in 1860 Abraham Lincoln won the presidential nomination on the third ballot in Chicago, Illinois. Lincoln stood before America and said: **love one another without distinction.** Lincoln held America together with empathy, a passion to end racism and a desire to unite us all as one. And for a time the kingdom came.

Lincoln's **love without distinction** showed in his relationship with Edwin Stanton, his secretary of war. Stanton was rude with Lincoln. Yet Stanton had the talent for organizing the war effort that Lincoln needed for the Civil War to end. Lincoln saw in Stanton a man who could unite the country for his aim to leave America a legacy of love. Lincoln wanted to get America back to the garden. Lincoln said:

“Die when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.” Stanton acted like a thistle but his talent flowered and made the country flower.

So, Lincoln chose his Judas. The two men were not alike. Lincoln open; Stanton secretive. Stanton described the president as “a long, lank creature, who wears a dirty coat on the back of which his sweat has splotched wide stains to resemble the map of the continent.” He mocked Lincoln. But Lincoln did not take Stanton personally. If Lincoln was to achieve a love without distinction, if he was going to bring America back to the garden, he needed to not take things personally. Stanton had strengths Lincoln did not. So, Lincoln planted a flower where a thistle was and the kingdom came.

Love without distinction transforms us. Love without distinction surprises us. When we do not take things personally, we are transformed. The kingdom comes. When Lincoln died, Stanton sobbed louder than the others, consoled Lincoln’s son and stood at the end of Lincoln’s bed and sincerely remarked with **a love that made no distinction:** “Now Lincoln belongs to the ages.”

Do we St. Paul's, want to work on leaving a legacy of love as Carol Eustis defined love? Do we want to get back to the garden? Can I, your rector, invite the thirteenth generation of St. Paul's to belong to the ages? Can we **love one another without distinction** or rank? Without taking anything personally? Can we leave a legacy of love?

This Tuesday at 3 pm I invited people to come help plant the left-over Easter lilies and hydrangeas in our rectory garden. I wasn't sure anyone would come. The sun shone. The birds made a Woodstock in the poplar trees. I thought of my vow I took when I knelt before all of you at my installation: "Grant that, by the brightness of your Holy Word, all the world may be drawn into your blessed kingdom." Then you came. Just as you had spontaneously stood up last week. Walking down the street with shovels. You knelt before the thistles. We worked among one another without hierarchy. We got back to the garden. We were unified. We were **loving without distinction**. This was the kingdom, and the kingdom come. **AMEN.**

Beilage zum Artikel vom 20. Mai 2025 *Spencer Reece: Warum wirken seine Reden so lange?* in der Kolumne von [www.redemanufaktur.com](http://www.redemanufaktur.com)

