

Written Copy: John 15:16-17 “All You Need is His Love”

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Sunday, May 5th, 2024

Text: John 15:16-17

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

The text's intent

The Father shares His sacrificial and unconditional love to Jesus in the same way He shares it with us. It comes through the Holy Spirit working in baptism along with His gift of faith and He works to keep it abiding and growing through Word and Sacrament. Through that abiding love He moves us to keep Jesus' commandments to love God and love others sacrificially and unconditionally. We cannot choose to love in this way as we don't have it in our hearts, we can only do so through His gift of faith and love that flows into us as the branch connected to Jesus the Vine. In His declaring this love to us through His sacrificial death and resurrection we are given the gift of joy from Him that is based not on our situation in the world but our branch to Vine relationship with Him. He chose us and connected Himself to us that by our abiding in Him by faith we should bear the fruit of that love in good works toward others in our vocations. And because He knows this is difficult He encourages us to ask the Father to help us do this in accordance with our witness to Christ as Lord and Savior, and He will provide accordingly to His will and plan. Through our abiding faith relationship with Christ we can continue to sacrificially and unconditionally love one another.

Focus Statement:

Jesus declares and makes known His love for us in the same way the Father did for Him, in our baptism. We are chosen by Him to be connected to Him in a faith relationship as a branch to the Vine. Through that faith relationship flows the fruits of Jesus sacrificial and unconditional love for us, forgiveness of sins and restoration to right relationship with God. His Spirit works through Word and Sacrament to keep us abiding in this relationship, keep us growing good fruit production, and calls us to repent when we fail, and receive His forgiveness through the Gospel declaration.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We cannot choose to abide in His love. We cannot choose to love others as Jesus commands us. We can and do share relational love with those who are family and friends, but we cannot and will not choose on our own to love those who are unloving toward us.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Motivated by the Spirit through the means of grace, look for ways to share this love of Christ as fruitful works that witness to His sacrificial and unconditional love for all. Seek His help in prayer as we struggle to love the unlovely. Abide in a repentant faith relationship with Him as a branch to the Vine that is Christ.

Subject Sentence: Christ calls and equips us to bear the fruits of His love.

Introduction: We Need More than Our Love

It should be easy to discern a common theme presented throughout our Epistle Lesson and Gospel Lesson today, and that is “love”. It’s something that is very much lacking in our world today as we look at all the things that are going on: the wars in Ukraine and in Israel. And here in our own country we see love lacking in the unrest between those who support the Palestinians vs. those who support Israel. There is a lack of understanding, and an unwillingness to share one’s view on the war in Gaza in a non-violent and lawful demonstration. In a very general sense, there is a lack of love and compassion for fellow man throughout our country and our world.

It’s nothing new. We’ve been here before. Think back to the protests in the 60’s during the Vietnam war. And what was an answer that was put forth by young college age kids at that time? [**Play clip of the Beatles performing “All You Need is Love”**] “All You Need is Love” as the Beatles proclaimed on a live television broadcast called “Our World” 57 years ago June 25th, 1967. The hippie movement climbed on board this wagon as the answer to the problems of the day. And how did that work out? How did it work out for the band that made this recording? Well, less than three years later, they would break up over business and artistic differences in such a non-loving manner that these men who were the closest of friends almost came to blows and spent years in court suing one another. It seems they needed something stronger than the love they were peddling.

Not only they, be we too as we live out our lives as faithful followers of Jesus need a stronger love, especially as we consider His words in **John 15:12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”**. It sounds easy on the surface, especially as you look at those you are sitting next to here in the Sanctuary, your friends and your family. You can perhaps say, “Yep. I love them. No problem.” But how far does one have to look for it to become a problem?

For the Apostle Peter in our first reading, it was 30 miles north of where he was staying in Joppa. What Jesus was going to do was such a problem for Peter that Jesus had to send a vision of all kinds of unclean foods being lowered on a blanket. Jesus told him to eat. When Peter three times refused citing these foods as being unclean, Jesus three times told him not to declare unclean what He, Jesus, had declared clean. The point being Jesus was sending him to the Roman centurion Cornelius, and Peter should not refuse to speak the Gospel of Jesus love to those Jesus was declaring worthy to hear it.

How far do you and I need look before Jesus command to love others becomes too difficult? **Matthew 5:43-44** ⁴³ **“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”** ⁴⁴ **But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”**. How far in our lives do we have to look for this to become a problem? Perhaps not even outside the walls of this Sanctuary.

In these verses Jesus is giving us, His Church, a command. That means what we are looking at is the Law, what God tells us we are to do and how we are to live as His beloved children. And is always the case with the Law, when we really look at it, we must consider that keeping it involves not just what we do with our hands, but what we say with our mouths, not just what our facial expressions show, but how we think and feel about others. This is what matters to God. That makes this hard, if not impossible, to love as He commands us. Our correct response to what God is telling us to do in the Law is “I am not doing it, and I cannot.” That is true when it comes to what we try to do on our own. So, what is the answer? Jesus gives it to us in our Gospel Lesson.

What Kind of Love is This?

John 15:9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

First of all, we need to discern what kind of love Jesus is talking about., He is talking about the love that the Father declared to have for Him, and the love that He has declared to have for us. Now the God the Father loved God the Son from eternity past. But the concept of their eternal relationship within the Godhead is a bit beyond our comprehension. That’s why God the Son came down and took on humanity. And it is in His incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth that we can understand this “God love”.

The Father declared His love for His Son in His baptism in the Jordan. **Matthew 3:16-17** ¹⁶ **And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;** ¹⁷ **and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”** The Father testifies to His love for Jesus as His beloved Son, His much-loved Son.

Where has Jesus declared His love for you? In your baptism! He declared this love to you as the Holy Spirit came down upon you in the water and the Word. He worked faith in your heart and life by which you hold fast to all the fruits of Jesus love He produced for you. What are those? His sacrificial giving of His body in your place. His suffering and dying and shedding His blood in your place. He laid down His life for you out of the greatest love, giving all He had to save you from separation from Him and the Father now and for eternity. This love is not only sacrificial, but also unconditional. He didn’t suffer and die just for those who already loved Him. He didn’t suffer and die just for those who would eventually come to faith in Him. He suffered, died, and rose again for all mankind, even for those who would never believe in Him. He did this as the greatest testimony to the supernatural power and strength of God’s love for you and me. And He pours out that love into your heart and your life in baptism.

John 15:9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

He tells you and I to abide in that love. How do we do that? Think back on our Gospel Lesson from last Sunday where Jesus used the extended metaphor of us being the branch connected to Him the Vine. That connection is our faith relationship with Him. It was established in your baptism not just for a portion of your life, but to last your entire life lived on this earth and continue on into eternal life to come.

How do we remain and abide in this faith relationship with Christ our Savior? Through the presence and ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. He is at work in you now through the Word preached, read, and sung. He began that work in your baptism and continues to work through the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. You abide in His love when He shows you your sin, shows you the unloving thoughts, words, and actions, and then points you to the work of love produced by your Savior to forgive those loveless ways and restore you as His much loved and precious child.

Chosen and Appointed to Bear the Fruit of Jesus' Love

So how do we go about living a life of love toward those around us? By realizing this truth:

John 15:16 ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

We realize that we cannot choose to love others the way God commands. We don't have that love within us. It is a supernatural love and it's beyond us. Instead, Christ chose you. He chose you in your baptism and by the work of the Spirit changed your heart and mind forever. He connected Himself to you in that faith relationship so that through it you and I would begin to bear fruit. And what is this fruit? It's His sacrificial and unconditional love directed at others. It's thoughts that stimulate words that match actions done for the good of others which witness God's love for them. Bearing fruit involves us using our time, talents, and treasures to do works that witness to the love God has for you, and for me, and for all people; even those we find hard to love.

Jesus knows what a hard thing this is for us, loving those who are not loving, not friendly, not gracious toward us. So, He encourages us to turn to the Father in prayer. Be honest about your struggle to love that person. Appeal to Him to work through whatever means to change your heart, to give you that love that you don't naturally have within you for this person. And Jesus promises that in keeping with His will that we love one another as He has loved us, the Father will answer this prayer in His own time and way. He certainly has in my life.

He did that for me with Victor. Victor was the General Manager at Hillers. He derived pleasure in building himself up by knocking others down. He would brutally dress me and my fellow managers down not just in private, not just in the backroom, but on the floor, sometimes on the front end before cashiers and customers alike. He made it personal, calling us stupid and worthless, even mixing in some of those colorful metaphors that have no place being repeated in a worship service. I recall one particular brutal time on the front end when a customer who I knew pretty well, as he was leaving, walked right in between Victor and myself and the other manager being dressed down. He looked at Victor, then turned his back to him and faced us. He said in a voice loud enough for Victor to hear, "Who the heck is this jerk?" I responded, "This is our General Manager." The customer responded, "I think I'm gonna find a new place to shop" and walked out. Victor stood stunned. He started to follow the customer out the door, then thought better of it. He called us into the backroom to continue his rant, now focusing not just on us, but also on the customer, repeating the question over and over again, "Who does that guy think he is!" I refrained from the answer I wanted to give, "He's a regular customer who's not going to shop here anymore because of you!"

When my last day came as I was preparing to leave to go to Seminary in St. Louis, I thought of how I would like to get even with Victor. I had visions that ran the gamut of dressing him down verbally, to shoving him up against the wall. But I knew these things were not how Jesus would want me to handle things. They were not the kind of witness a Christian, let alone future pastor should give. So, I had been praying. The moment came that last day when he walked up to me and in his usual snarling sarcastic way said, "So, your finally leaving, huh?" Nice way to speak to an employee who'd been there for 25 years. There were plenty of ways I could've responded. But I found myself simply saying, "Yes sir. I'm headed to Seminary to be a pastor." And I held out my hand. He looked at it for a long moment. Then responded, "Humph", and turned and walked away without shaking my hand. It has taken a long time, much prayer, but I can finally say I've forgiven him.

Chosen by Christ to bear the fruit of repentant faith, the Holy Spirit kept working in me through Word and Sacrament worship to change my heart and mind to move me to forgive Him. The Holy Spirit is at work in you to do the same for all the Victors in your life.

He called and appointed us to bear fruit that abides. What is fruit that abides? Fruit that doesn't rot but continues to be fruitful and useful. When you use your time, talents, and treasures to share faith in Christ it can have an abiding result. Long after the work you did to help someone has been forgotten, long after the phone call you made to someone who is grieving has been forgotten, long after the car you helped your neighbor fix has quit running, long after the food you helped served at Franklin Avenue Mission is gone, the Holy Spirit remains at work. He can use the witness of your words and actions, the witness of your life lived in the faith and love of Christ, to call someone else to that life of faith. He can use the testimony of your words and works to strengthen the faith of a brother and sister who is struggling. And one of the greatest witnesses to this love of Christ is forgiving another who has wronged you, simply because you have been forgiven so greatly in Christ Jesus. That is fruit that abides. That is love that abides. That is faith that abides.

Conclusion

"All You Need is Love"; but not the kind of love the Beatles were peddling. That love is not strong enough, not abiding enough. The Love we truly need is the supernatural love that can only come from Jesus Himself. It's the love He freely, repeatedly, and generously poured out into your heart and life in baptism and continues to pour out through your participation in Word and Sacrament worship. It's Jesus love. It's sacrificial: it moved Him to give up His life for you. It moves us to give up our time, talents, and treasures in service to Christ and the Gospel as His Church. It's unconditional. He shared it with you and I when we were unloving and unworthy. It's His love that abides through faith and continues to call us to repentance to restore us as precious children of the Heavenly Father. It's the love we begin to share now, although not perfectly. It's the love that forgives us when we don't share it. It's the love we will have completely and perfectly and will pour out upon everyone in the eternity to come. All you need is His love that comes to you through faith in Him. May that love fill your heart and your life through your abiding faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.