

May 9, 2021
Sixth Sunday of Easter

“Loving as Your Friend Does”

John 15:9-17

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” Right from the start of today’s reading we are in over our heads. Jesus speaks of the divine Father’s love of the divine Son. Our finite human reason cannot comprehend the concept of the Trinity let alone the perfect love that exists within it and among it before the creation was even a thing. Abide in Christ’s love? We can’t even begin to wrap our minds around Christ’s love!

Thankfully, Jesus gives His followers some instruction on how this works: *“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”*

Important note here—when Jesus says “keep my commandments” He is not talking about the 10 Commandments. He very clearly explains His commandment is that we love one another. Of course, loving God and neighbor results in a keeping of those 10 Commandments, but Jesus is not saying “Obey the law.” He is clearly saying *“love one another as I have loved you.”*

Yet, despite this, a lot of Christians come to church on Sunday, worship, hear the Word, drop their offering in the plate, receive the Sacrament, sing praise and thanks and go home thinking that they have obeyed Jesus’ commandment. Mind you, coming to worship every Sunday is right and good. But this isn’t what Jesus’ directive says at all.

First and foremost in the Divine Service God is loving you. This is abiding in Jesus’ love in the sense of standing in front of the firehose of His love blasting the abundant and complete good Gospel gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation—the fruit of His life, death and resurrection—as they pour forth in His Word and Sacrament, in the liturgy and hymns, in the remembrance of His completed promise to save you. True, we respond to God’s grace in love and thanksgiving here, but that loving response is rightly directed at God. But Jesus directive is not “Love God.” It is clearly *“love one another as I have loved you.”*

However, a lot of Christians walk out of the sanctuary on Sunday morning feeling nice and spiritual having “done their duty” for Jesus and walk into their earthly life feeling no necessity whatsoever to love the people they find there. That’s really wrong minded. You are not here doing your duty for God. If anything, God is doing His duty for you here, fulfilling His promises made to you in the Gospel. Abiding in that love of God for you, your “duty” is to love one another as Christ has loved you.

That doesn’t happen here in the pew. That happens out in the world.

First and foremost this directive to love one another applies to the community of believers—Jesus is addressing His disciples here, the night of the Lord’s Supper before His arrest and crucifixion. St. Paul flushes this out in His epistles. There should not be divisions and quarrels and lawsuits among us. We are united in Christ Himself! How can we be opposed to one another? We can’t!

Yet this happens in the church...a lot. I may rankle a few feathers here, but it’s for your good. Years ago before I arrived here there was a great division in this congregation. I know that emotions were hot and passions high and many people feel they were justified in their words and actions. Frankly, I don’t care about that. My questions for you is this: In the midst of that conflict did you love one another (meaning even those Christians on the other side of things) as Christ

loved you (meaning even if they didn't deserve your love)? If not, you've got something of which to repent. Jesus' command is clear and without exception, "*Love one another as I have loved you.*"

If there is any strife between you and another Christian in your life, don't let it stand. Love, forgive, reconcile, even if it means humbling yourself. Even if it means sacrificing of yourself.

Yet I most certainly don't think we can limit this to Christians. I mean Jesus says "...as I have loved you" and He didn't just die for Christians. He redeemed the whole world. And loving people out in the world simply cannot happen only here in the sanctuary. Again, this commandment of Jesus doesn't happen here—it happens out in life!

But we don't do it. Our attitude too often is "I've got my life and you've got yours...and that's how I like it." We turn a blind eye to someone in need because we have our own responsibilities and needs to take care of. We willingly hold grudges because some people are just, well, sinners and comfortably so. Simply put, we put ourselves first, love those we want to, and we leave the rest to be loved by somebody else.

"*Love one another as I have loved you*" just doesn't make any allowance for that kind of attitude. Jesus would have been just fine abiding in that incomprehensible love within the glory of the divine Trinity, but He didn't. He loved you by humbling Himself to abide in your flesh and serve you unto a sacrificial death on a cross.

So how can we do better? First, as always, repent. Don't make excuses. Don't justify your lack of love. Just beg forgiveness at the foot of Christ's cross and receive forgiveness by His grace. Then realize what His mercy and grace has made you: "*No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 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. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*"

Jesus has made you His friend...God's friend. He has chosen you, appointed you to abide in His name, His character, His essence, His self. He baptized you into Himself, into God. He feeds you His very body and blood, the person of God. You do not abide in His love by your own power to do so. He makes you to abide in Himself and thus, you do. You abide in the very love of God that is undiscernible and unfathomable to you...because Jesus says so.

Believing this as you walk through life will manifest itself in you and surprise, surprise, you'll find yourself loving another in ways kind of like Jesus loved you, because good friends tend to rub off on one another.

"*Love one another as I have loved you*" can be an very daunting commandment, if you focus on how well you're keeping it. But when you focus on the "as I have loved you" part you realize what a friend you have in Jesus. Out in life abide in the love your friend Jesus has for you and the "love one another" part is just going to happen.

Amen.