

Sunday: The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Date: May 9, 2021

Text: A Whole Lot of Love

Title: John 15:9-17

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

The past few Sundays there has been a subject that keeps coming up. With our lessons centering in the writings of the beloved disciple John, we have heard a lot about love. From the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of John, we have encountered Jesus who calls us to walk in the light of Christian brotherhood. “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). We hear in 1 John 3:1, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so, we are.” John speaks of what love looks like in the act of Jesus laying down his life for us in 1 John 3:16. Last week, we heard “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” (1 John 4:7).

In the Gospel of John, we have encountered Jesus as he taught the disciples through a couple of his “I AM” statements, “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 11:14) and “I am the vine; you are the branches” (John 15:5).

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus builds on what we heard last week saying, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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.”

When I hear Jesus’ teachings to the disciples in John 15, about abiding in the vine, I am reminded of a song that was written by Neil Young and first recorded by Linda Ronstadt in 1975. The song is entitled “Love is a Rose.” Maybe you remember it or have heard it. The lyrics begin,

Love is a rose, and you better not pick it.  
Only grows when it’s on the vine.  
Hand full of thorns and you know you missed it.  
Lose your love when you say the word mine.

While this song points to the human emotion of love, it also reinforces the very thing that Jesus speaks of in his teaching as he calls us to “abide in my love” (v 9). As Jesus talks of vines and branches, his focus is on remaining connected to the source of love, the source of life, the source of our salvation.

The love Jesus speaks of is not a love that comes and goes at the whim of human emotion. Have you ever heard someone say, they have fallen out of love with someone they professed to love previously? The fickle human emotion of love in this vein is centered in the feelings of the individual. Love is good as long as it serves my purpose. Love is wonderful, as long as I feel it is focused on me. It often fades when times get tough. When challenges to a relationship are encountered, other emotions compete for the throne in the heart. Anger, frustration, even hatred, push love aside and begin to rule with an iron fist. These emotions drive away the one who was loved by focusing on me instead of we, or you. It is in this scenario that we see the rose of love picked. It has stopped growing as it has lost its connection to nourishment. The bitterness that results is feels like a handful of thorns. When we claim that we are center, when we say that love is owed to me, when we say love is mine, we lose it.

As Jesus is gathered with the disciples, on the night he was betrayed, he talks of the relationship he has with the Father, and the relationship he desires to maintain with them. Jesus loves his disciples. Not a fickle, human love, but a love that never fades. A love that has existed since the beginning of time and will continue to the end of the age. A love that sustains people in faith in this world and the next.

The love of God is truly an amazing thing. In fact, it is beyond amazing. While we might think we are full of love. What we experience and share is but a hazy reflection of the love of God. Jesus puts it this way, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (v 13). Jesus was but a few hours away from laying down his life for his friends, the disciples. But that sacrifice was not only for them. Jesus died for all mankind past, present and future. Jesus’ definition of friends goes far beyond our concept of friendship. For us, a friend is someone who get along with. Someone that we are comfortable with. Someone who sees things pretty much the same way we do.

We see this concept of friend in Jesus and his disciples. They were a group of men who were of much the same mindset. They loved God and wanted to see the

Messiah enthroned. They did not necessarily understand what Jesus' ascension to the throne consisted of though.

God's idea of friend and in fact his idea of love stretches to unfathomable lengths. Jesus speaks of laying down one's life for a friend. Paul draws us to see the definition of who is a friend in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus,

<sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

What tremendous lengths God's love reaches. We were enemies of God. We were a people who were self-centered, worshiping ourselves and pursuing our desires. In fact, we were opposed to God in every possible way. By our corrupt human nature, we are opposed to God. We were dead in our sins. There was no way for us to do anything on our own to change our deadness. Dead is dead; it is the total absence of life.

The fact that in spite of this, God loved us is beyond comprehension. He loved us and sent his only Son to take on human flesh, endure the ridicule, pain and suffering of his earth. He stood silent in the face of his accusers and gave his life for us. Jesus, true God and true man, died on the cross for you and for me. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). He gave His Son in payment for the sins of the unloving people of this earth. He gave His Son for a people who hated Him. He gave his Son for people who did not truly know love.

We know love because God first loved us. This love is transformative. This love draws us out of our selfish desires and gives us the ability to see beyond ourselves. By the saving grace of God, we are brought out of the depths of our sin and given new life. This life is one in which we are called to obey the commandment of our Savior, Jesus. That commandment we heard in the Gospel reading today as Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:9).

This is not a new commandment but is a summary of the second table of the Law handed to Moses on Mount Sinai. This is what God intended for humanity from the beginning. In the fall into sin, this ability to love unconditionally was lost in mankind. God however, never stopped loving his creation. His love continued to pour out on man and beast, without reserve.

In our restoration to a right relationship with the Father, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are showered with that love without our merit. We are given the love of God and given the ability to love God in return. The gift of faith given us in our baptism works in us a reforming of our hearts into a living soul, capable of loving God. In that gift we are given the ability to love others. While we will never be perfect in that love, God's love will not waver.

The commandment Jesus gives to his disciples, to love one another as I have loved you is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through our relationship with God, we are given good works to do. Paul continues in Ephesians 2,

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

As we share the love of God through the good works God has given us to do, we become the masks of God. We are the image put forth through which God meets the needs of our neighbors. It is through this action we love God and love our neighbor. All of this is empowered by our connection to the vine. Jesus told us last week,

<sup>4</sup> As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

As we remain connected to the vine, we are enabled and empowered by the grace of God to love one another. A love that does not require or even expect reciprocity. It is a love like the Father has shown in his Son, and Jesus has shown to his friends. It is a love that led Jesus to lay down his life and take it up again for you and me. It is a love that led Jesus to bear the wrath of God for sin. It is a love

that extends beyond his disciples. It comes to each of us as we abide in the vine Divine, Jesus our Savior. It is the love of God for you and for me. It is this love that we share as we gather around the body and blood of our Lord in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. It is a love that is unfathomable. It is a love that makes us a new creation that abides in the love of Christ drawing nourishment and life from the vine, then sharing it through our lives.

*Amen.*