

John 15:9-17

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Christ is risen! Our text for this morning is from John's Gospel, "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. 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. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command 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.”

“Aha!” you may be thinking, “This text here totally undermines your sermon last Sunday pastor, about how we should abide in the vine and it means that we don’t have to do anything. When we keep reading, we see Jesus specifically telling us to keep his commandments!” And I would say thank you for noticing, straw man parishioner that I made up for a clever start to my sermon.

Indeed, it is very easy for us to look over this text and walk away thinking that Jesus is the little more than a new Moses. He is the new lawgiver. He doesn’t come to give us a new 10 Commandments, but he does come to make sure that we know what God wants to see from us. We’d better get off our lazy rear

ends and get to work, so that we can keep Jesus' commandments if we want to be in his love. And we need to be in his love to be saved, so we'd better be keeping his commandments if we want to be sure of our salvation.

So, what exactly are the commandments that Jesus lays out for us here? Does he tell us to make sure that we pay our pastors a nice big salary? Maybe he wants us to make sure that we keep the oil levels up in our cars. No, let's keep this in context. He gives us one command; to love one another as he has loved us. Unfortunately, this is a pretty big command, and one that if we are honest, we fail at regularly. It is in fact impossible for us to love other people as Christ loved us.

You see, the reason for this, the problem, is that people are just the worst. People lie to us. They steal from us. They gossip and spread their discontent to others. They say things that hurt us. So much of the ills and sorrows of our world are caused by

the evil that we people unleash onto it and into it. People see loved ones die in brutal manners because of crime or war.

Children go to bed hungry because their parents' employers refuse to give raises or their parents do not handle what they have well. Acts of violence and hate occur in countless ways in countless places against people who are different all over the world. Either because of race, religion, or sex, people are brutalized and victimized by people who think that they "deserved it."

And yet Jesus tells us that we should love other people. Of course, he does say that we should love one another though. He's saying this to his disciples. Truly, Christ calls us to love our fellow Christians in particular. And so many think and hope that this will help. We don't have to love all of *those people* who are out there. We can hold all of the unbelievers in disdain, while loving our fellow believers. Surely that's doable, right?

Aside from grossly misunderstanding the Lord's intention here, I don't think so. Unfortunately, some of the most heated and tense disagreements that many of us go through come as a result of disagreements with fellow Christians within the Church.

Many of you have seen and experienced that trauma and heartache that comes when a congregation becomes divided because of sin. It hurts when people who we have worshipped with, prayed with, learned with, and communed with turn their backs on us simply because we either support something or refuse to support something or someone. It hurts every time.

And when people hurt, they often lash out. Anger is easy because it doesn't require us to think or evaluate anything. Anger lets us simply turn off our brains and rage at the world or the person who has wronged us.

Thanks be to God that he has loved us first. Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died for all people, including the people that

we don't like. When we say that Christ is risen, we are saying that he rose for the people who we would rather he not save. His blood was shed on the cross for the people who we don't think deserve it. His death was just as much for the people that we think unworthy of his love as it was for us. And thanks be to God for this fact! There are undoubtedly people out there in our lives who we have wronged in some way or another that they would accuse us of being unworthy or undeserving of Christ's love. And if you think that of yourself, it is simply not true, dear friends! Christ has died for all of us. Christ is risen for all of us. Christ loves all of us. He shows it at the cross.

And this love that he has shown to us changes us. It changes the way we think about our world and about the people around us. It begins to soften our hearts so that we might be able to see the people around us who we would look at askance as people who might need help rather than our hate. The only

reason that this happens is because we have first been made branches that are connected to the vine. This transformation of our minds occurs only passively. It happens precisely because we abide in the vine. Because we abide in Christ, he gives us the grace and mercy to see others with grace and mercy as well. We love others because Christ has first loved us.

This love that he calls us to is not something that we have to accomplish in order to obtain his love. No, his love of us and in us is a prerequisite to us being able to love our neighbors at all! It is Jesus who kept the Father's command to love. Our Lord Jesus Christ loved each and every single one of us so greatly that he laid down his life for us. Because we are branches, the vine does what is necessary for the life and benefit of the branches. He loves us. He loves you. He makes us his own through the waters of baptism. He feeds us in the Lord's Supper. He sustains us daily through his Word.

Again, we branches can bear no fruit apart from the vine. Our connection to the vine must necessarily come first. He makes us alive in him and then causes us to produce fruit that is pleasing to the Father because we abide in him. This love that we produce, this fruit, comes only as a result of the vine's work first. So even still, we are at best only secondary actors in this process. It is Christ who begins. It is Christ who makes us alive. It is Christ who gives us his love and who inspires us to love others, even and especially people that we would rather not love.

This is what it means to be a Christian. This is how we follow our Lord, by living out this faith and showing love to the people around us. But this fruit of love does not earn us anything in heaven. We are not better Christians nor are we somehow more blessed by God comparatively speaking if we love people. Rather, our Lord tells us that he has spoken this to us so that his joy may be in us and that our joy may be full.

This is where our good works fit. They are done as a result of faith, a result of the Gospel working on us. Truly loving our neighbors brings us joy. This text ought not to be used as a bludgeon to force people to “be nice” or taken as a command that we should put on a fake happy face and be inauthentically nice to people. That is not what we are called to here. We are called to a true and faithful expression of the faith and joy that we have in Christ. If we do not have those things, then we know where to focus. We ought to focus and trust the Word of God that declares our sins are forgiven and that we are clean.

Truly, we do not choose Christ, but he chose us. And he chose us so that we could bear the abiding fruit. Our fruit only comes because of Jesus and what he did for us. We remember and we rejoice that he suffered and died to pay for our sins. And we similarly then celebrate that Christ is risen and the life that

he gives to us, mere and simple branches to his majestic vine that has grown to spread throughout the world.

May he continue to work in us so that his love can be clearly shown to the world. And may we remain faithful to our savior, that we would continue to abide in his love and to abide in this life that he has so graciously given to us. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.