

Easter 6, May 9, 2021 (Jn 15:9-17; Acts 10; Ps 98) SERMON

Last week we heard eight verses from the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, where Jesus told his disciples that he was the vine and they were the branches. The nine verses from today's gospel continue immediately after that. And this is the sermon, straight from the mouth of Jesus.

Verse 9: **As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.** Can you take this in? The *love* that God, the Father, has for his Son Jesus is *the same love* Jesus, the Son of God, has for each of *us*. God loves us with his *wholly holy* divine love. Unconditional love. Perfect love. Everlasting love. (You can never out-sin God's forgiveness; you can never out-run God's love!)

Verse 9b: **Now remain in my love**—like the branches last week that had to remain in the vine. If a branch is broken or cut off (or *pruned*, in the language of the gospel), then it can't bear fruit. It doesn't receive nourishment. When the connection is broken, the branch will die. If we lose our connection to God, our *rootedness*, we'll lose our spiritual health and eventually our faith will die.

Verse 10: **If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.** Do you hear what we have to do to remain in the love of Jesus? We have to **keep his commands**. That's all: keep the commands of Jesus.

Verse 12: **My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.** How has Jesus loved his disciples? Well, he *called* them to follow him so they could learn from him what love looked like: seeking out those who were on the margins of society, the ones who had no voice because they were ritually unclean. He healed the lame, the deaf, the blind, the mute, those who had "demons" or leprosy.

He also healed *relationships*. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus taught that tribe or race or status means nothing. After his teaching, he asked the lawyer (probably a Pharisee) which of the three men who passed by the wounded man was a *neighbor* to him? The lawyer had to admit it was the Samaritan. Jesus said to him, **"Go and do likewise"** (Luke 10:37). **You are my friends if you do what I command.**

Are you following what it means to love like Jesus?

Verse 13: **Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.** You know the story. **God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that *everyone* who believes in him may not *perish*, but may have everlasting life** (Jn 3:16). You know how that story continues. **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Romans 5:8).

Verse 14: **You are my friends if you do what I command.** Really?? *Friends of Christ??*

Verse 15: **I no longer call you servants, because servants do not know their master's business. Instead, I have called you FRIENDS, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.**

*What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit; oh, what needless pain we bear—all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

*Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged—take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness—take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy-laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge—take it to the Lord in prayer. Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer. In his arms he'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.*

Yes, Jesus has called us *friends*. But that means more than giving us comfort in grief, forgiveness of sins, a yoke to help us bear our burdens. He learned *friendship* from his own relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit; and that friendship was filled with purpose, with mission and ministry.

**As the Father has sent me, so I send you** (John 21:21b)—to welcome the outcast, to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit those who are in prison (Matthew 25:35-36). To teach the illiterate and the differently-abled. To walk alongside those who carry heavy burdens. To speak the truth with love, even when others don't want to hear it. — **I have called you *friends*, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.**

Verse 16: **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.** Jesus is plain here. He doesn't wait till we're ready to make a decision for Christ, or give our lives to him. He doesn't wait till we think we have time to do something "Christ-like." Jesus **CHOSE** you. He knew you weren't perfect, or perfectly willing and able, or perfectly *anything*. Yet he **chose** you.

He set you apart in baptism, when you were sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. He's called you through his words in scripture, in music, through worshiping with family and friends—the body of Christ, the fellowship of believers, the communion of saints. He's forgiven you your every sin, *as far as the east is from the west* (Psalm 103:12a).

But *why* has he chosen you? He has **appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.** This is a *gift* with a *call* attached. Marching orders.

**This is my command: Love each other!**

**Go and do likewise!**

Thanks be to God!