

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Easter 6B
May 9, 2021
John 15.9-17

Chosen In Love; Chosen to Love

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. (John 15:12-13 ESV)

Dearly Beloved Friends of Christ Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

. Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you." Sounds so simple, doesn't it? Just love one another. But we all know this is far from easy. We all say and do things that get on each other's nerves. We all act at times as if others were our enemies, rather than our friends, yes, even our brothers and sisters in Christ. Too often we fail to love one another. Too often we and our fellow Christians are downright unfriendly and unlovable to one another. And this is because we still live in this sinful world and we have within us many "daily frailties and shortcomings" (Luther 24.244). And if our own sinful inclinations weren't bad enough, we are under constant temptation by the devil. Luther reminds us that too often the devil successfully

"injects poison and suspicion into a heart because of a single word or glance and thereby stirs up mutual animosity. He is a master in this art and devotes himself to it most diligently. . . . [Thus,] Trifles can lead to such quarreling and enmity that great harm results to many. The blood soon begins to boil; then the devil shoots his venomous darts into the heart by means of evil tongues, and finally no one says or thinks anything good about the other person. The devil keeps on fanning the flames and is eager to set people against one another, to spread misery, and to incite them to murder." (Luther 24.244-245).

That's why we need to hear our Lord's words today. Because when we listen to our Savior and take His words to heart, we'll be constantly on guard against the devil's craft and cunning, so that such poison doesn't develop in our hearts. We have to constantly fight against any and all suspicion that may be stirred up in us so that love does not depart and die out. And if this has already happened, we need especially to repent and turn to Christ so that we can be restored and improve love and friendship.

Because we are so often unloving and unlovable, we need to hear our Lord tell us what He has done for us as well as what He wants us to do. Indeed, Christ tells us that He has chosen us to be His friends. And this not because we are worthy of such a title or because we are such good people. We are not His friends because we have a mutual likeness with Jesus or because we love others as He loves us. We are not His friends because He needs something or anything

from us. But we are Jesus' friends simply because He says so. He calls us friends, so we are. He chose us to be His friends and shows His boundless love to us. He laid down His life for us so that we could have forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Praise be to God that Jesus chose us to be His friends and not the other way around. That we are His friends is all His doing and none of our own, just as being a branch attached to the vine is all His doing. That's why we confess: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." We don't decide to be His friend, to let Him into our heart. In fact, we *cannot* decide to follow Him. Rather, in His great love for us, He has chosen us and done everything to make us His friends, including laying down His life for us. Let that sink in for a moment - He has chosen us; He has chosen you. He laid down His life for us, for you. "Love that found me—wondrous thought! Found me when I sought Him not" (LSB 611.2).

And because He has shown such love to us, He wants us to show such love to one another. And what does this love look like? "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." Do you need an example of such love (other than Christ)? Certainly mothers do this for their children. Or think of soldiers who have given their lives for the sake of their friends, their brothers in arms. Or consider the love between Jonathan and David. They were the closest of friends. They cared for each other to the point of risking his life for the other. Jonathan put his life on the line when he warned David about Saul's plot to kill him. Jonathan even suffered having his father try to kill him because he was David's friend. What they did for each other did not create their love for each other. Rather, their love for each other demonstrated itself in what they did.

It's the same thing Jesus says to us today. While we were still His enemies, He sought us to make us His friends. St. Paul writes, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:7-8). Thus, Jesus made us His friends by shedding His holy, precious blood on the altar of the cross. He made us His friends by taking our sins, even our sins of lovelessness, upon Himself. In Holy Baptism, He grafted us into Himself so that we might bear fruits of faith. And He has made known to us what He heard from His Father. He has given us everything we need to have eternal life. He's kept nothing from us. Nothing!

So, He tells us to love one another as He has loved us. Oh, how hard that is! Yet, we are not usually called to sacrifice life and limb, as He did for us, though that *may* happen. Rather, Jesus wants us to give evidence of a faith which receives and clings to His love. He wants us to serve and help each other, promote his welfare, show him fidelity and love, defend him and speak well of him in every way we can. We show thereby that we are true and fruitful branches connected to Christ.

Indeed, Christ has shed His blood and sacrificed His life for you, and even now bears with all the sins and frailties that still inhere in you. And as He thus bears your weaknesses, so you are able to bear one another's weaknesses. For "love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

Yet, whatever love we show toward one another, in whatever manner or degree, it is really Christ's love flowing through us. He gets all the credit. For even if you gave up everything, including your life, "it would still pale into insignificance when compared with what the Son of God did when He came down from heaven to take your place and willingly shed His blood and died for you, who had been damned and were His enemies. This is a love that is far greater and higher than heaven and earth and anything one can name" (Luther 24.251). And it is that love that enables our own.

So, repent of your unloving attitudes, words, and actions toward one another, especially fellow members of Christ's church. Trust only in your Lord's absolution to cleanse you from your sin. Rejoice in being chosen by Christ to be His friend and receive His love that you may learn to love one another as He has loved you. God grant it for Jesus' sake.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener