

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Easter 6B
May 5, 2024
John 15.9-17

Love One Another

"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,

Do you remember when you were a child and your classmates or friends picked up sides for a game. Two captains chose who they wanted on their team. Some were always picked early and some waited for the end. Some were never chosen, but rather given to the other team. If you were chosen, it was because you had something to offer, something that would help the team win.

Today we hear Jesus tell His disciples, "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. . . . These things I command you, so that you will love one another." (John 15:16-17). Did you hear that? Jesus chose you – not because you are so good or smart or nice, or because you might be able to give Him something or do something for Him. No, He chose you only out of His love for you. He chose you to give His love to you so that you may abide with Him forever.

And since He has chosen you who have no merit or worthiness to be chosen, He says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another." And then, as if that wasn't enough, He adds, "as I have loved you." Rats! It's bad enough that He commands us to love one another. After all, that's really hard, especially when someone isn't so lovable. Yeah, we may love our spouse, children, and grandchildren, maybe even our in-laws, at least most of the time. It's certainly easier when they're nice and loving toward us and not disagreeable or troublesome.

But there are probably lots of people we don't like to love, at any given time. Enemies, opponents, politicians, people who are bossy or mean or just plain difficult. People who rub us the wrong way or disagree with us or are just not up to our standards. You know, like that person over there in the other pew. Jesus wants me to love them? Even those I can't stand?

And what's worse is that it isn't just about other people; it's about me, too. I mean, honestly, when I look inside myself, I don't always see a whole lot of love. How am I supposed

to love others when I don't always love myself? After all, I'm often curved in on myself, selfish, and self-centered. If I love others, it's usually because they can do something for me. Many times I don't and can't love others.

And I suspect you don't either. Yes, you may love some people, maybe even some who irritate you a little. You may love some if they are lovable, but certainly not others who are not.

No, we don't love as Jesus commands. And, if left to myself, I can't. Especially when we listen to the whole command, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. "As I have loved you"! That's the hardest part. After all, who loves others as Jesus loves? Yet that's also the key! This is the all-important resource we need to do what Jesus commands. "As I have loved you." There it is. Jesus' love for us. Without that, we will never be able to do what Jesus commands, to love one another. First, Jesus has to love us.

And He has! Jesus has loved us. How do we know that? Well, listen to what Jesus says: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends." And then look at what Jesus does: He lays down his life for us! Surely this is the greatest love of all: Not some self-love or self-generated love that I find within myself. No, the greatest love of all is the love that Christ Jesus demonstrated when He laid down His life for us.

Think of that love! Was it because we were so loveable that Christ did this? Nope. Not at all. "Christ died for the ungodly," Paul says in Romans. Christ died for the unlovely and the not very loveable. It's hard to fathom this love, so pure and self-sacrificing as it is. The very Son of God came in the flesh, as a man, and loved a world of rebellious sinners. He loved those who would nail Him to a cross. He loved a band of fickle disciples who would desert Him in his hour of need. He loves a poor miserable sinner like me, a poor excuse of a disciple, who has failed his Lord and his friends and family so many times. That Christ does this for the likes of us—this is love, my friends, this is love. If you look up "love" in the dictionary, there ought to be a picture of Jesus next to it. Jesus with His arms stretched out on the cross, laying down His life for His friends. Greater love hath no man than this.

How do we get this kind of love with which to love others? We get it from Him. Last week we heard the verses from John 15 leading into today's text. Our message was about the branches abiding in the vine and bearing fruit. And that's how it goes for us being able to love one another: by abiding in the vine. Jesus even repeats it today. "Abide in my love," He says. Just as life flows from Christ the vine into us branches, so does His love. Jesus is the source of both, life and love. For us to be able to do what Jesus commands, to be able to love one another, we need to abide in Christ the vine. Abide in His love.

So this is how Jesus can command us to love one other: because we are connected to Him, and so we receive love from Him. What Jesus commands He also supplies. Therefore, it is

not impossible for us to love one another. We have the life and the love of Jesus flowing through us. We know what love is because we ourselves have received love from Christ.

Yet, there's more. For Jesus also says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." The love flows from the Father to the Son to us, and then out from us to one another. The Father has loved Jesus. Remember what the Father said of Christ at both His baptism and transfiguration? "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Father loved the Son who accepted the mission of saving the world. He loved Him for going to the cross and laying down His life for sinners. Love from the Father to the Son; love from the Son to us; and then love from me or you to one another. This is how it goes. This is how it flows.

So this is not something you have to muster up on your own, this love that Jesus commands. No, this is love you first receive in order to have something to give. The command to love does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it comes to us who have received, and continue to receive, life and love from the divine source, the living vine, Christ Jesus our Lord. The connection happens as we abide in the vine, as we abide in His love.

Now when Jesus says, "Love one another," He's talking about loving our fellow Christians, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Yes, He's even talking about loving these people here with us in church. Yes, including that person over there in the other pew that you don't necessarily like very much. Loving your fellow Christians, loving your fellow church members—this is Jesus' special concern here in this command. Not that we don't also love other people. We do. But in this passage, Jesus is calling special attention to loving one another within the body of Christ, both in this congregation and in the church at large.

Here are your brothers and sisters, my friends. They're sitting here in the pews right along with you. These are the people that Christ is commanding you to love. Now, will you do what Jesus says? This means forgiving the people you have a grudge against. It means getting to know the people you usually try to avoid. It means being alert to their needs and helping them in practical ways. It means giving of yourself to care for others. This is what love looks like. And yes, you can do it. Because you are connected to Christ and abide in His love. Amen.

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

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener
Pastor

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg
1297 E 900 Ave.
Shobonier, IL 62885
church: (618) 846-8383

personal cell: 330-204-4180