

LIVING HIS PROMISE, LOVING ONE ANOTHER

MAY 6, 2018 – 6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER (JOHN 15:9-17)

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. As we gather this morning as His disciples, we will look more closely at Christ being our source of true love. Last week, Pastor Dan explored the opening verses of John 15 where Jesus makes known to us that He is the true vine. He encouraged us to realize our connection with Jesus makes all the difference in our lives. In Him we live, without Him we die.

Just as Christ is the true vine and we are the branches through which He flows, Christ is the source of our true love and our love flows from the love He has given us. We live out His promise of love by sacrificially loving others the way he loved us. Christ gave His life sacrificially for our sin and unconditionally for our saving grace. We live out His greatest commandment by loving others as He loved us – with “agape” – selflessly, sacrificially, loyally and actively. We are commanded by Christ to love one another.

As a fellowship here at St. Timothy’s we have a vision to **Know the Father, Grow as Disciples of Jesus, and Go with the Spirit**. In today’s passage from John 15, we are given a clear understanding as to how this vision should play out in our daily lives. Here in the Valley, we are very much challenged by our busy schedules to find time to abide with Him. We find it difficult to set aside time to simply listen for His Voice by meditating on His Word. And even when we make attempts to do so, we often find we do not have the patience to simply commune with Him, wait on His guidance.

And yet, we have been blessed as a congregation to have a heart for loving and serving others. We truly seek opportunities to Go wherever the Spirit calls us to be difference-makers in the lives of others. Many throughout our congregation have spent hours serving at Village House, City Team, FISH Food Pantry, Great America Community Pick-Up, Mercy Mobile, and alongside Lutheran Border Concerns on our Mexico Mission Trip. We have found many ways to invest our lives for the sake of others – by listening as a friend, by encouraging one another’s growth, by giving in times of need, by helping when a hand is needed, and by speaking God’s truth and grace as God continues to shape the lives of those around us.

But all of our love for others must begin with abiding, otherwise we may love and serve with the wrong motives and for the wrong purposes. For us to live out His promise of love, of agape, we must abide in Him. We need to move beyond simply knowing in our minds that God is the true source of love, to connecting deeply with Christ so we can love like Him in all our relationships and all we do. When we abide in Him, we can begin to love as Jesus loves. When we intimately know the Father and allow His love to touch us deeply, we can **recognize, receive and respond** to His love by sharing His promise with those He brings into our lives.

That is the **main point of the passage** in John 15 that I want to share with you today. When we **intimately know** the Father and allow His love to touch us deeply, we can **grow** as disciples. As we grow, we will **recognize, receive and respond** to His love out of obedience to His command – **going** and sharing His promise with those He brings into our lives. His love must be the rich soil that feeds the roots of our love so that we may bear lasting fruit.

RECOGNIZE HIS LOVE

What does it truly mean to recognize His love for us? Jesus tells us,⁹ *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."*¹⁰ *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."*¹¹ *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

In the same way Jesus had an immeasurable sense of belonging and deep rootedness to His Father's love, we can claim the same promise if we remain in Christ. Remaining in Christ is a call to action for us. A call to keep the Father's commands, just as Jesus kept His commands. Every action Jesus took aligned to His Father's will. We must live out our lives in obedience to the will of God as well. By living sacrificially as He calls us to do so, Jesus promises us that we will remain forever in His love. Just as the disciples joy was fulfilled when they abided in Christ, we too will see continual joy in our communion with Him and in obedience to His Father's will for our lives.

RECEIVE HIS LOVE

How should we best receive His love into our hearts and minds? Jesus invites us into a deep communion with Him, a lasting friendship.¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command."*¹⁵ *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."*¹⁶ *You did not choose me, but I chose you...*

God's love does not simply accept us for who we are. His love transforms us. When He enters our hearts and minds, we become a new creation in Him. Through Jesus, God shows His love for us by changing us from unlovable sinners to His grace-filled children. Love sets us apart from the world as His sons and His daughters. Love sets us apart so he no longer sees us as servants but as friends. As His servants, we would simply be expected to live out the command He has given us. As His friends, Christ places His confidence in us, sharing with us the plans He has for our future. In the full context of John 15, we are branches, called to receive; we are disciples, called to follow; and we are friends, called to communion.

We did not choose Jesus... He chose us! For his divine purposes, He chose us. He chose us for His joy, for His love. He chose us to be His friends, to be His witnesses. He chose us to be His branches, His disciples, His servants, His lifelong companions, and his witness to the world.

The love Jesus expresses for us is motivated by the joy He passes along to us to complete the calling He has on our life. He gives our life a central purpose and a deeper meaning. We experience an inner peace and joy knowing that Jesus has shared intimately with us everything the Father made known to Him.

RESPOND TO HIS LOVE

With the recognition He has for us and with us receiving that love in its fullness, How are we then called to respond? Jesus leaves no doubt what response He expects. ¹² *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends... I appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.*

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are commanded to make His love the driving force of our lives. Love, completely and fully, comes from God alone. Because He put love in our hearts and minds, we have the capacity to love others by abiding in Him and adhering to His calling on our lives as His disciples.

Loving others as God loved us is the heart of Christian discipleship. Relationship that is centered on Christ and His sacrificial love on the Cross is the desire Christ has for us as He commands us to love each other. He has chosen each one of us for the purpose of bearing fruit, investing our lives in the lives of others. We do so by reflecting His character traits as our own – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The nature of our love should demonstrate a willingness to die to ourselves and instead, serve and live out our lives for one another. The essence of our response to His calling rests in our connection to Him through prayer. He promises us lasting fruit as we continue to plant and harvest in His name.

This past Monday, we were blessed to celebrate in worship with the women from the Village House before they moved on to the next host congregation for their housing. In heartfelt closing remarks shared by one of the women, she recounted overhearing a conversation one evening. The volunteers were talking about how to engage with the guests that were with us over at Carter Fellowship Hall. She was curious who these “guests” were that they were talking about in their conversation.

So she pulled one of the volunteers aside and asked, “who are the guests you mentioned?” The volunteer responded, “why you, of course... each of you is our guest.” In tears, she shared how she had been called many things as a homeless woman but never “guest.” This is the love of Christ – inviting a guest into our lives, to feel at home, to feel the peace of Christ wash over them! Hebrews 13:2 from The Message reads “*Be ready with a meal or a bed when it’s needed. Why, some have extended hospitality to angels without ever knowing it!*” Many angels, indeed!

I could share example after example over this past month where many of you extended love and hospitality to others and answered God's call on your life to "love one another" – in your homes, your neighborhoods, your schools, your workplace, and your ministries. Each of these is a reminder that when we **intimately know** the Father and allow His love to touch us deeply, we can **grow** as disciples. As we grow, we will **recognize, receive and respond** to His love – **going** and sharing His promise with those He brings into our lives.

For those going on the Mexico Mission Trip, we have been reading a book by Greg Finke entitled, *Joining Jesus on Mission: How to Become an Everyday Missionary*. In the book Greg shares that God has prepared us in advance to be used by Him to "bless someone with a word of hope, an act of kindness, and attitude of grace, a little of our time, or a little of our help." Ephesians 2:10 reminds us, ¹⁰ *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*"

While sometimes the things we may do can seem small, in the redemptive plan of Jesus, they can be significant. Mother Theresa once said, "not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love." In closing today, as we recognize, receive and respond to Christ's love. How would the world around us change if we became more intentional and consistent about doing small acts of kindness for the people God brings into our path?

What would happen if we let the intimate relationship we have with Christ become the richness from which we reflect Him into our relationships with everyone else? What if we planted one seed every single day? How long would it be before we would see those seeds begin to sprout and bear lasting fruit for His Kingdom?

Christ makes it clear for us, *"Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other."* Let us pray...

John 15:9–17 (NIV84)

⁹ *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.*