

May 5, 2024

Pastor Prieue

Easter 6: Love- His and Ours

John 15:9-17

What is Love? Jesus Defines His Love and Ours

In the name of Jesus, the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his own blood. There's an entire genre of music known as "Love Songs" which will give you a million different descriptions and definitions of love the way people think they are experiencing it. Most of the time it's about the romantic, butterflies in the stomach, kind of love. Sometimes people "Can't Help Falling in Love". Sometimes "love is a burning thing and it makes a fiery ring." Someone might promise, "I will always love you." Sometimes a person might just be trying to figure out, "What is love?" Or they know they haven't experienced the full thing yet, so they are pleading, "Bring me a higher love."

You know those last two were on to something. They're looking for something they're not sure how to define and haven't found yet. It's almost like they asked Jesus those questions, because our text for today from John 15 is Jesus' answer to the question, "what is love?" And the answer is him bringing us a higher love. That's our theme today-- **Jesus Defines His Love and Ours.**

The words of our text pick up immediately after the Vine and Branches section, which Pastor Raasch preached on last week, which is convenient because that foundation has already been laid. He is the vine. We are the branches He gives us life. He enables us to bear fruit, and he begs, pleads, and encourages us to remain in him, to stay connected to the vine.

Then as Jesus advances the thought from the vine and branches metaphor, he begins to talk about the most obvious fruit of faith—LOVE. But love never starts with us or our fruit.. The Apostle John tells us in our second reading, "**We love because he first loved us.**" (1 John 4:19 NIV 11) That whole section from 1 John 4 is really like John's inspired commentary on Jesus words from John 15. And, well it appears, John who recorded both of those sections of Scripture, took all these things to heart from Jesus his dear teacher, because that's the way that Jesus starts the section, "**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.**" (John 15:9)

Here we simply can't go any further without stopping to unpack the value of those words. From eternity, God and his Son had perfect love for each other in the Trinity, and with that same perfect love, Jesus came for us. You'll notice how much different that kind of love is than just the hormones from when two people have a crush on each other and have the butterflies about it, which probably isn't love at all, but is the way that you see love defined by the songs on the radio and all the modern dating shows. Jesus is talking about a higher, greater love that the world

is searching for but can't seem to find. Jesus' love gives, it sacrifices, and not just while it's convenient or being reciprocated. Even when its costly, he gives everything.

How does he put it, **“Greater love has no one than this...”** or in other words [No one has greater love than this:] **to lay down one's life for one's friends.**” (John 15:13). He wasn't just musing or philosophizing about it in the hypothetical. Jesus spoke those words on the night he was betrayed, knowing full well he was about to carry out the last full measure of his unflinching love for us. The next day he would lay down his life for his friends, and not just them but his enemies too, just as he said. God had promised throughout the Old Testament that he would and on Good Friday he did it.

In doing so, Jesus defined a real, true and *greater kind of love* for all time—1. A love that sacrifices self. He defined it by his actions, demonstrated it in his commitment, and sealed it with his blood. “What is love?” you ask. That's it! John says, **“This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” (1 John 3:16).** And again, **“This is how God showed his love among us; He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9).** And a third time, **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)**

I guess it makes sense that the **“God is love,”** (1 John 4:8) as John writes, then Jesus is the one who defines it, initiates it, and demonstrates it to us and for us. And what magnificent, marvelous matchless love it is! It's the kind of love that inspires Christian hearts to write the “Love Songs” we sing here in Church, old classics like “Jesus Loves Me” or a newer one with that very title- *Magnificent, Marvelous, Matchless Love*. It's one that takes a little practice to sing, so we didn't just toss it in today, but let me point you to the 3rd verse. *“What grace, that you entered our brokenness, you came in the fullness of time. How far we had fallen from righteousness, but not from the mercies of Christ. Your cross is our door to redemption; your death is our fullness of life. That day, how forgiveness flowed as a flood: magnificent, marvelous, matchless love.”* CW 577.

That's the kind of love Jesus meant when he said, **“So have I loved you.”** And it's the love he pleads with us to remain in. **“Now remain in my love.” (John 15:9).** Did you hear that key word “remain” echoing from last week.” You are already in my love, dear believer. Remain in it! And now, Jesus has begun making the transition from his love as a summary of the whole

Gospel message to talking about our love, which summarizes the whole Law in one word—LOVE. Love God and Love your neighbor.

It boils down to one word, but it's no small command—to love. It's an all-encompassing, never-ending command that dictates every move we make, every step we take, every thought we think. As we've been saying, it's not just a chemical reaction, or a funny feeling, nor do we get to define it by saying something like "Love is love. If I think I feel it, then it's love, no matter who it's for or how I carry it out." No, Jesus defines our love for him in terms of keeping his commands. **"If you love me, keep my commands."** (John 14:15). And **"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love."** (15:10). Now from that we don't want to get the legalistic idea that God loves me more when I obey him more, and the more I follow the rules, the more I'm earning his love. That's the way the Pharisees thought.

No, the love that comes from God for the world, for sinners, is constant and unconditional, but we can remove ourselves from it by disobeying. Think of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The father loved his son all the way through the story, both at the beginning and end, but when the rebellious son ran off, broke every command in the book, and wound up starving in the mud with the pigs, was he still experiencing his father's love? Well no, not out there! Not because his Father didn't love him still, but because he had removed himself from that love and from his relationship with his Father. When he came back to his Father, did his Father still love him! Yes, he was so delighted he threw a party, but wouldn't it have been better if he had never run off? Of course! So Jesus pleads with us to remain in his everlasting love, to walk in the path of his commands, and to express our love by obeying what he has asked of us.

One of the authors of that hymn we read before is a man named Matt Papa. He also wrote a book called *Look and Live*, where he is able to sum up the way Jesus defines his love and ours in an incredibly concise and insightful way. *"Love is your good at my cost which results in our joy. Your good, my cost, our joy."*¹ See how the phrase checks out when we apply it to Jesus' Love. There is no greater good for us than Jesus giving us life and no greater cost for him than laying down his life.² And why would he pay such a price? **"For joy set before him, he endured the cross."** (Hebrews 12:2) He paid the greatest cost to give us the greatest good so

¹ Papa, Matt. *Look and Live*. Bethany House. 2014. P 176, 177

² Papa, 181.

that together we get to experience the joy of each other, the joy of friendship. **“You are my friends!” (15:14)** He is happy to say about us.

Now let’s apply that same definition in the other direction—our love toward him. Jesus says, **“You are my friends if you do what I command.” (15:14)**. There we see both “the good” and the cost. “The good” for Jesus is us expressing our love and friendship back toward him. The cost for us is obeying his commands, which means denying ourselves, it means death to the flesh and its desires, and it means taking up the cross. Just as Jesus defined his love, he defines ours the same way—**2. a love that sacrifices self**. But he doesn’t ask this of us because he wants to take all our fun away. Quite the opposite, he wants to give us joy. **“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (15:11)**. Jesus experiences joy in us as we love him and do what he commands. John says the same thing in 3 John 1:4, **“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”** And we also experience joy when we do what he commands. It feels good to do what God says is good, even when it’s hard. Like the psalmist says, **“I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches...I delight in your decrees.” (Psalm 119:14)**.

Finally, there’s one more piece to this, one more object for our love- OTHERS. Jesus loves us. We love him and keep his commands. He spells those commands, **“My command is this; Love each other as I have loved you. (15:12)**. This is what Jesus chose and appointed us to do—to bear fruit by loving one another. Love other people with a love that sacrifices. We can apply that phrase again--your good, my cost, our joy, this time in the direction of everyone we meet in our lives.

If it’s toward my spouse, well it’s good for her to catch up on some sleep, and to not have to do all the night shifts and house chores, so at a little cost to my own sleep and energy and maybe my TV and golf schedule, I can take the night shift with the baby so she can sleep, and I can give her some time away from the kids, and I can help with take the garbage out and wash the dishes, which all still results in our joy, because it is to both of our joys if she can feel like a human being and not a sleepless zombie.

If it’s towards my children, well, I’ve been told that it’s good for children to have clean diapers, so at the cost to me of smelling and handling them, I can love my kids and my wife by changing the kids’ stinky diapers. And it’s to all of our joy that I get to see them grow up happy and well-cared for.

In my community, I see children over at the Miracle League Park who have all different kinds of challenges. It's good for them to laugh and have fun playing a game that without help they might not be able to play, so at the cost of some time each week, I can volunteer with them and, man, I'm telling you the joy of seeing the joy on their faces far outweighs the cost.

This list goes on and on and the opportunities are endless whether it's your friend, coworker, family member, or just a random stranger. You can love them by sacrificing for them, doing something for their good at your cost. And well sometimes you might wonder where the joy is. Maybe you get taken advantage of or exhausted by someone who takes and takes until there is nothing left. In those times, it's a good thing then that we have a Savior who makes our joy complete with his friendship and never stops filling us with his love as we follow him and remain in his love. Amen.

Now to him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, to him be glory forever and ever. Amen.