

Resurrection Hope Lives through Love

- I. God's unconditional love for us
- II. Our unconditional love for others

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 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. 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: to lay down one's life for one's 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 so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!) For the past five weeks the Mount Olive family has been reflecting on how that fact, that Christ is indeed risen from the grave, impacts our lives today. We've considered how Christ's resurrection gives us hope in the midst of uncertainty. It puts our hearts at peace. It drives out fear. And through our connection to Christ the Vine, it produces good fruit in our lives. Well, today we want to focus on one more way that the hope of the Resurrection impacts our lives. And it's through the love which it creates in our hearts and lives—love which Christ showed to us first. Our theme for the day is simply this:

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Our text for today is a part of the discourse that Jesus had with his disciples on the night before he died. He's already washed their feet and celebrated the Lord's Supper with them. He's told them that he's going to prepare a place for them in heaven and that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He's explained that he is the Vine and they are the branches, and if they remain in him, they will bear much fruit. Now he goes on to tell them how that fruit will show itself in their lives.

Jesus begins with the words, *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you."* (John 15:9) Isn't that a powerful statement? You think about the perfect love that God the Father had for his Son, from before time began—the love which the Father expressed at both Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration, when he said out loud, for all to hear, *"This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:17) The Father loved his Son with a perfect love that we cannot fully comprehend. And now Jesus says that the same love that the father had for him, now Jesus has for you. Jesus put it pretty bluntly: *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you."*

My friends, do you realize how absolutely critical it is to know that Jesus loves you? Have you thought about how important it is for you to know that there is someone, somewhere, who just plain loves you? Given the national holiday that we're celebrating this weekend, I expect you have given some thought to at least one person who loves you, namely, your mother.

Isn't that right? Mother's Day gives us a chance to give our mom a little extra attention, maybe send her a card or give her a call. Maybe serve her breakfast in bed. But Mothers' Day is also a chance to reflect on all our moms have done for us. I mean, what do you think is the most important thing your mom ever did for you? What's the one thing that helped shape who you are today? The one thing you could count on?

For me, the one thing I could always count on from my mom is that she would always love me—even when my behavior wasn't so lovable. You might say that my mom's love, for the most part, was unconditional. Her love for me was not dependent on how well I behaved or what I looked like or even what I smelled like—like the time I caught a skunk and brought it into the house thinking, “Aw, it doesn't smell that bad.” By the look on my mom's face as I walked into the kitchen, it was clear that...I was wrong! I reeked! But my mom still loved me; loved me enough to scrub me down with tomato juice to get the stench off of me. On that day, I wasn't so lovable, but I knew I was still loved.

In fact, maybe you've experienced that same kind of unconditional love from your mom, or your dad. Times when you hurt them by something you said or did—yet they still loved you. Maybe loved you enough to hold you accountable for your behavior, or even disciplined you for it, but most importantly, forgave you for it, continue to love you, continue to hold you close to their hearts.

I don't know about you, but I think that kind of solid foundation of a parent's love is so important to the emotional, spiritual, and even physical, development of a child. You've maybe read about what happens to infant children who are not regularly held and cuddled and touched. They often fail to develop. They fail to thrive. In some cases, they die. Now, contrast that with a child who from birth is snuggled and cuddled and kissed and caressed, the child who is held and rocked and bounced on the knee. The child who hears words of love and affirmation and encouragement and praise. That child grows up knowing that even though they're not perfect, in fact, even though they have a sinful nature that rears its ugly head again and again, still, that child realizes that he or she is loved. And there's no measuring the impact that that knowledge has on a person's heart and life.

In fact, it reminds me of a Facebook post that I saw recently. When my daughter posted a picture of my grandson, Hudson Robert, she received lots of comments like, “Congratulations!” and “He's so cute!” and “We're so happy for you!” But my favorite comment was simply, “He's so loved.” Far more important than how cute he is or how strong, or how healthy, or what a great fisherman he'll become, is how loved he is—not only by his mom and dad or grandma and grandpa, but how loved he is by his God, the God who spilled blood for him. The God who washed him clean in the water of holy baptism. The to wash away his sins. The God who will adopt him into his family through the washing of holy baptism. The God who promises that he will never leave or forsake him, but will cause all things to work for his eternal good.

My friends, you realize that in many ways, you are that child. You are unconditionally loved by God. That means that God's love for you is not dependent on anything you do. God doesn't wait to see how well you obey him before he decides whether he will love you or not. What does Scripture say? *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*. That's unconditional love. Christ's love is not diminished by our disobedience; nor is it increased by our obedience. Christ's love is always there for us.

But now, maybe you're thinking to yourself, “Wait a minute. If Christ's love is unconditional, then why does Jesus say what he does here in our text? Let's read those words again. Jesus said, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved You. Now remain in my love. If*

you obey my commands, you will remain in my love.” (John 15:9-10) What does that mean, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love?” Is Jesus saying that he will love us as long as we don't mess up? Or he'll love us as long as we obey his commandments? Or to flip that coin, if we don't obey him, then he won't love us? Is that what Jesus is saying? No it's not. Notice carefully what Jesus says. “As the Father loved me, so have I Loved You. Now remain in my love.” Do you hear the distinction there? Jesus' love for us is rock solid. It's as firm as the Father's love for his Son. What's not so sure is whether we will appreciate that love. Whether we will hold on to that love? Or, as Jesus puts it, whether we will remain in that love? In Jesus' statement, it's not God's love that's conditional. It's our behavior that conditional. Will we choose to remain in God's love or will we walk away from it by living a life of sin?

Wasn't that the choice that the prophet Jonah once faced? Jonah had to decide whether he was going to obey God's command to preach to the city of Nineveh, or was he going to run away from God? Well, if you know the story of Jonah, you know what Jonah did. He ran. But God didn't stop loving Jonah. In fact, in love, God sent a big fish to rescue Jonah. Inside the fish, Jonah came to his senses and confessed what he had done. He said about himself, “*Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.*” (Jonah 2:8) When people feel separated from God, typically it's not God who moved. God's love for even the sinner is unconditional.

Doesn't Jesus make that same point in his parable of the prodigal son? When the younger son demanded his inheritance while his father was still alive, which basically meant, “Dad, I wish you were dead,” did the father stop loving him? Absolutely not. Even when the son was wallowing in sin and then wallowing in a pigsty, did the father's love for him waver? No. And how do we know that? Because of the way the father treated that son when he returned. He welcomed him with open arms and treated him like a king. Even though for a time the son didn't want his father's love, that didn't change the love his father had for him.

You realize, the same thing is true for you and me today. When in our own sin and selfishness, we choose to disobey God, God doesn't stop loving us. When our sins separate us from God, it's God's heart that still breaks for us. God is like that father scanning the horizon, waiting for his son to return. And when, by the grace of God, we come to our senses, when we realize that we've made a mess of everything and we don't deserve to be called God's child, what does God do? He does what he's been doing the whole time. He keeps loving us and forgiving us and assuring us that we are his dearly loved children.

Or to use an illustration that has taken on a new meaning in my life, God is like a father who takes his son in arms, and snuggles him close to his heart—even when his diaper is dirty. That's what God does for us. Even though we keep filling our diapers, God keeps loving us. He keeps cleaning us up, in Christ. Ultimately, that's what changes us from the inside out. It's God's unconditional love for us in Christ, shown to us in the suffering, death and resurrection of his Son—it's that love that, in turn, motivates us to reflect that love in our lives. Or to put it another way:

I. God's unconditional love for us
Empowers II. Our unconditional love for others.

Isn't that the connection that Jesus makes here in our text? Jesus tells his disciples, “*My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.*” (John 15:12). In other words, the love that Jesus has shown to us serves not only as the motivation for our love, as the Apostle John once wrote, *We love because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19)...Right? It's his love that prompts our love for others. But Jesus' love also serves as the model for our love. Jesus says, “Love each

other as, (or in the same way as) I have loved you.” What does that mean? It means to love others unconditionally. In other words, no, it's not, “I'll be nice to you, if you are nice to me.” Or, “if you show love and respect to me, I'll do the same for you.” Or, “As long as you are of the same political party, have the same ideology, as long as you think and act like I do, then I'll care about you.” No, what did Jesus do? He loved his enemies. He prayed for those who persecuted him. Jesus didn't take into consideration people's economic status, or their ability to repay him for what he did for them. No, he just simply selflessly served their needs without asking anything in return. Jesus says that's the kind of love that he would have us display.

Now, what does that look like in our lives? Well, let me give you a couple of examples. Maybe there's someone in your life that did you wrong. They said or did something that hurt you. And now, it's like they are oblivious to the pain they caused you. It's like they don't care at all. Tell me, what would it look like to love that person as Jesus loved you? Would it be to say, “I'm never letting go of what they did to me?” Or would it be to say (and show with our actions), “Father, I have forgiven them, because you have forgiven me for so much more?”

Or how about that person who always seems to be in need. She needs someone to talk to, he needs help with a situation he's got himself into. They are always looking for money or advice or time. What would it look like to love those people unconditionally? What would it mean to love them as Jesus loved you? Would it mean saying, “I don't think your worth my time?” Or would it mean saying to them what Lord said to you first? Go ahead, “Come to me when you are weary and burdened.” “Call upon me in the day of trouble.” “Cast your anxiety on me, for I care for you.”

My friends, every day of our lives, God gives us opportunities to treat others the way that Jesus treated us. Forgiving as he forgave us. Serving as he served us. Loving us as he loved us. All unconditionally. For in that way, the hope that we have in our risen Lord, will be reflected in our lives. It's just like we said at the very beginning, Our Resurrection Hope Lives through Love.

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!) Hallelujah! Amen.