

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of May 17, 2009

All You Need is Love in Christ (John 15:9-17)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John:

Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have keep my Father's commandments and abide in His love."

This is the text.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, let's talk about love. It's a big topic. It's something we all want in this world. We want to love and we want to be loved. We use the word in different ways. At times what we mean by love can be vague. We say 'I love my children, I love my family, I love my job, I love sports, I love summertime, I love fast cars, I love cake and ice cream'... and so on. Since we use the word in so many ways it is clear that love concerns us. It occupies our thoughts.

In our text today we see our Lord's concern about love as well. We see that love is the foundation of God's will for His creation. It is also the foundation of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son and it is to be the foundation of all of our relationships with each other as well. At the Last Supper with His disciples in the upper room Jesus gave some of His most profound teachings. In fact, nearly a quarter of John's Gospel is from Jesus' words at the Last Supper, the night when He was betrayed. And many of these teachings centre on the topic of love. In the Gospel of John, in fact, the word 'love' is used 57 times. In this passage alone it is used 9 times; that's 9 times in 9 verses. In John's first epistle he went as far to say that "God is love." It is important to know this. First and foremost God is a God of love. Love is the basis for everything He does.

And so Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love...these things I command you, so that you will love one another." Last week we heard about the Vine and the branches. Jesus is the Vine and you are the branches. He has made you a branch. That means He has brought you into a relationship with Him through Baptism. You have been joined to Him and He feeds your spiritual life just like a vine feeds its branches with nourishment and life. In other words, He has justified you by His grace, by His mercy and choosing.

This is wonderful news but what does it mean for the life we live here and now? Friends, our faith in Christ amounts to more than simply waiting to die and go to heaven. Our faith means that He is present with us now as well and He is present so we can live through Him here in this present life and enjoy Him and reflect His love.

The famous rock band the Beatles had many number one hits. One of their biggest was called, "All You Need is Love". The title says it all. It is a nice sentiment. If only the world was full of love then we would have no wars, no fights, only peace, tranquility and good will. There is a serious problem. We are sinners at heart. We tend to put ourselves first; we tend to hold grudges; we may love our family and friends but not so much others and certainly not those who may irritate us or might offend us.

Theologically speaking the statement, "All you need is love" is quite true when we consider that God is love. All we need is God, all we need is Christ. He is the One who, in His love laid down His life to redeem us. And He shows this love through His disciples as well.

In His love He also invites us to be a reflection of His love to others. He says, "These things I command you, so that you will love one another." Jesus compares this relationship to the vine and the branches. He has made you a branch by grace through faith in Christ and this means you will bear fruit because you are joined to the vine. The fruit of love comes by being in Christ. The key is to stay joined to the Vine. And how do we do this? - By staying in His Word; by meditating on the Gospel of Christ and by seeking to apply His teachings every day to our life.

Most of us I believe are happy to hear the words, "Jesus loves me". But are we happy to hear Jesus' command to love others as He loves us? We must ask ourselves, "Do I want to love others?" "Do I truly want to love someone who is not so nice to me?"

The epistle reading says that His commands are not burdensome. At first glance we might say His commands are the hardest thing in the world. No doubt to be like Christ is a constant struggle. In fact, to be like Christ is impossible on our own. This is why we so dearly need to stay in His Word. The closer we keep His Words, then the closer we will walk with Him. It is as simple as that. If we are to bear more fruit, to show more peace, joy, love, gentleness, self-control, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness, then we must stay in the Vine and cling to Jesus' words. This is where grace is found and His grace gives the power to walk like Him.

For it is only by His grace that we can ever begin to resemble Jesus in this world. In short, the love of God, the love of Jesus produces love in us. When we hold on to Him by grace then He bears more fruit in us and works through us.

This walk with Christ involves prayer as well. Jesus says, "Whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you." This is not a name and claim it type of prayer. It is not a prayer that says, "O Lord, will you give me a Mercedes Benz?" It is a prayer to bear fruit. And if we ask God to love someone more He will surely help us do that. It is a prayer that says, 'Lord, I want to be able to show more love and peace.' And the Father says, "You got it". Ask the Father to help you bear fruit and He will do it. That is His promise.

This staying in the Vine, staying connected to Jesus and His words is the key if we are to do anything good in God's eyes. As the epistle to the Hebrews says in chapter 11,

“Without faith it is impossible to please God”. Jesus says, “Without me you can do nothing”, that is, bear fruit. Scripture uses the image of the head and the body. If the parts of the body are to function properly they must be connected to the head, that is, to Jesus and His words. If His words seem to go in one ear and out the other we need to come back to the Head. We do this every day. Our mind so easily wanders. Our hearts so easily stray. We must have our ears tuned to Jesus. He will direct our steps and guide and help us to do His will.

Friends, when we read this passage we can easily misunderstand it. Jesus calls His disciples ‘friends’. And yet at first glance this friendship seems almost conditional. He says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” We are tempted to say, “What kind of friend is that?” But make no mistake, God’s love for you does not hinge on how perfect you are. He never stops loving you. In fact, His love is what moved Him to die for a sinful world and for each of us personally.

Rather, His love impacts His people. It has the power to change us from the inside out. In effect He says here, “You show yourself to be my friend if you do what I command”. In other words, what we do shows what we believe. If we nurse a grudge it shows we have forgotten Christ’s forgiveness to us. If we forgive and do good to others it shows we have the God of grace living inside. We can’t make God love us more but our works are the evidence of our faith. The Gospel produces good works. When we cling to Christ and His words the result is that He does good works through us. If we find ourselves struggling to grow and bear more fruit we need to come back to the Vine, to Jesus our Saviour. He will supply what we need.

This is the holistic power of the Gospel. It is the supreme and ultimate medicine for the world. It is the power of God’s love in Christ. Not only does it give us the healing of forgiveness and eternal life, it heals others through us by producing good works in us. And so, through Christ the wispy sentiment of the Beatles, “All you need is love” becomes real and solid. For all we truly need is the God of love, the love He showed when He gave Jesus to atone for our sins and rise from the dead. This is the love that shows itself in love for others. And friends, God has chosen you to be His instruments, to dispense His love and show in word and deed what a great God we have. What a blessing, what an honour, and what a life we have in this God of grace, in the One who laid down His life for us so we might live through Him.

Indeed, all you need is love. All you need is the love of Christ. His words are the Vine. Let’s stay connected. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.