



John 15:9-17 - 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.

Love one another!

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

(Revelation 1:5b-6)

Love each other. Death has a way of sharpening focus. When the end of life is near, inevitably the people around the expiring person will lean in close to hear what he's got to say. That's the context in which the disciples heard these words of Jesus. It was the night before he died, and in a matter of hours, Jesus would **lay down his life for his friends**. When you get home today, read through John 13-17 and listen to Jesus speak, completely mindful of his coming departure. In this long discourse with his disciples on the eve of his death, if there's one truth that Jesus made abundantly clear it's this – He loved them. He washed their feet, he showed them himself as the only way to heaven, he promised them peace in a world that would hate them, and said that the connection between him and them was so close, it was like a vine and its branches. 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, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.**

Your Savior says, **Love each other, as I have loved you.** That's a tall order, if we're comparing apples to apples (or, I suppose, grapes to grapes, if we're mindful of the context). **Love each other, as I have loved you,** Jesus said. But how? The love Jesus has for you led him from divinity to humanity, from heaven to earth, to hell and back to make you his own. To love others as Jesus has loved us sounds like a pretty tall order – and it is. But don't miss his point. The kind of love Jesus shows you is a love that is focused on your best interests, not his own. The kind of love that Jesus shows you is a love that's willing to sacrifice everything, if it means that you benefit. To love others as Jesus has loved me is a tall order, because by nature I always and only want to do things that will benefit me. Self-interest is a whole lot more appealing than selflessness. Self-satisfaction sounds so much sweeter than self-sacrifice. So, think about it. What is it that gets in the way of me loving someone else just like Jesus loved me? What makes it so hard? I don't want to love the person who hurt my feelings or made me mad, because then it'll be like I'm saying what they did was OK. I don't want to love the person who's so stubborn and never seems to get it; I can't love the person who's different from me; I just won't love the person who hurt me. If I give to someone else – be it time, money, or attention – then there will inevitably be less there for me. Did you catch it? What gets in the way of me loving someone else just like Jesus loved me? It's me. It's my sin. How on earth can I be expected to love someone else, when I'm just so in love with myself?

So it must be as Jesus says, **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.** Because of our sin and our self-centered love, we deserved nothing from God but a one way ticket to hell. Jesus had every right to send us away, smug and self-satisfied. But he didn't. Instead, he chose us. He forgave us. He grafted us into himself, the true Vine. Our relationship with him, our fruit of faith, our love for our neighbor, they're all a gift from Jesus. To prove the point, listen to the remarkable thing Jesus said to his disciples, **I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends.** Friends of Jesus – imagine it! Did those disciples deserve it? Peter would deny him...three times. Thomas would doubt him. James, John, and the rest of the bunch all bickered about the places of honor they'd like to occupy. Did they deserve the title of "friend of Jesus"? No more than you or I do. But, in his grace, Jesus gives, Jesus gives, Jesus gives; not just a title, but his very self. **Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.** Why did he do it? To make you his own.



That undeserved love of Jesus certainly had an impact on his disciples. Did you catch how the disciple, the Apostle John wrote in our second lesson for today? **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**

According to church history (and maybe a little bit of popular legend) all the apostles of Jesus died in some pretty gruesome and horrible ways for confessing their faith in Christ. The apostles died martyrs' deaths – all of them except John. So John was the one out of the twelve who lived out his years into old age. There is a church tradition that when John was a very old man in Ephesus, some of the people in the congregation would have to go to his house and literally carry him to church. So, they'd scoop him up and cart him all the way to the front of the assembly where John, allegedly, would always preach the same five word sermon: "Little children, love each other." And that was it. Week after week, they'd help John to the front and he'd say it again, "Little children, love each other." But why? Why go to all the trouble as a practically immobile shut-in to speak one sentence to his fellow believers? Because John was there. He heard these words come from the mouth of Jesus himself. Even in old age, John expended all of his strength to bring the word of Jesus to people – not to bash them over the head and say, "You'd better be loving, or else..." No, John spoke this way, John wrote this way because he was there – he saw the embodiment of perfect love; the kind of love that lays down his life for his friends.

Love each other as I have loved you. It's a tall order and, by nature, you simply cannot and will not do it. But remember what we heard last week. **I am the vine, you are the branches.** Jesus doesn't leave you alone. He has grafted you into himself, and it's only because of him and his love for us that we can love each other as Jesus has loved us. What wondrous love is this?! The love that didn't think of heaven's glory as something to be selfishly grasped; the love that led the Creator of all things to gestate in a womb for nine months and become completely dependent on his mother. John saw this love that touched the unclean, healed the sick, raised the dead, and gave sight to the blind. The old man can't even stand up straight, but he belts out his five word sermon with joy: "Little children, love each other!" Why? Because your Savior Jesus has loved you with an everlasting love. He has covered you completely in his perfect righteousness before God. He has set you free from all your sins. He's removed the sting of death and shackled the devil forever. That's love – not a kind of love that burns fast and bright for a few moments and then it's gone. No, the love that Jesus has for you has no limit and knows no end. I probably could've saved us about fifteen minutes this morning and just stolen a page from the Apostle John's playbook – "Little children, love each other!" But I didn't want anyone to have to try to carry me to the front of church, so maybe this is just as well.

"Little children, love each other!" Do you want to know something? This is the secret to happiness and I mean true happiness. Jesus said, **I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.** Jesus wants HIS joy to be in you and for YOUR joy to be complete! Do you see what he's saying? Read through the gospels and ask yourself, what was so 'joyful' about Jesus' ministry? All the universe belongs to him, but the Son of Man had no place to lay his head here on earth. His holiness sets him apart as completely "other" from humanity, yet Jesus rejoices to be the guest of sinners. The eternal Son of God is undefiled by sin and its consequences, yet when he comes to live among us, he rejoices to touch the leprous skin and shout out cowardly demons ravaging a poor soul. Jesus' joy is seen in his healing touch, his forgiving word, his compassionate care – all to people who didn't deserve it! Jesus wants that same joy to be in you and your joy to be complete, but in a way that the world would never understand. In the land of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," the prevailing thought is that in order to be happy, I need to look out for me. I've got to structure my life in a way that will optimize everything and bring maximum benefit for me. But in order to love as Jesus loved, we look not to



ourselves, but to the other person. Nothing gave Jesus as much joy as loving people who didn't deserve it. Christ's love to me results in Christ's love through me. And we don't need to climb to the heights of heaven to love others as Jesus has loved us. In fact, quite the opposite! Look around you.

Christ-like love is always directed outside myself, to my neighbor. I'm not in a bubble of isolation. Instead, God has placed you and me into a crowded world and immediately sewn us into the tapestry of hundreds, even thousands of lives, all ripe with opportunity to love as Christ loved us. Christ's undeserved love is what motivates the man to be willing not just to lay down his physical life for his bride, but to spend his years putting her first, looking out for her best interests, and loving her as Christ loved the church. Christ's undeserved love is what motivates the wife to have her only thought be, "How can I help my husband be Christ to me today?" Christ's undeserved love is what motivates the child to listen to their parents, even when they might not like what they have to say. Christ's undeserved love is what motivates each of us to die to my own ideas and desires and look to the needs of others. Only the love of Jesus is what moves me to be patient with those who grind my gears, and forgiving the sins of those who don't deserve it – just like Jesus did for me. Love one another – not to earn God's favor, because you can't. Love one another, because you already have God's favor in Christ.

You have a One who laid down his life to pay for your every sin. You have an Almighty God who calls you his friend in Christ. You have a Savior who made it his joy and delight to save you for all eternity. He left everything behind, since it meant having you. Stand in awe of God's overwhelming love to you in Christ! And I don't even have to tell you – love one another!

Amen

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:7)