



Come on Branches – We can do it!

6th Sunday of Easter, 2015 John 15:9-17

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ –

Good morning

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love...this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Love

A good Creation Care passage as we are reminded to love and care for the world God created and loves –

And, a good Mother’s Day passage – as we celebrate and remember those we love and those who have or do love and care for us, not only mothers, but aunts, grandmas, sisters, friends and others.

Love

OK – we GET this – this isn’t one of those obscure, hard to understand passages in the Bible –

Love

We teach it to our children –

And a Child sings “Love, love, love that’s what its all about cuz God loves us we love each other.”

Yes – exactly -

Love -

We talk about love in church and Sunday school, in Bible Study and Confirmation. We sing about it in worship -

And an Adult sings “Love divine, all love excelling, Joy of heav’n to earth come down!”

“YES!” Thank you

Yup – we GET this – we KNOW that JESUS commanded it –

Pastor Hannah sings, “This is my commandment that you love one another that your joy may be whole.”

Exactly – Pastor Hannah – we get this -

But wait –

DO we?

Have we as a church, as individuals, as beloved children of God, really grasped this command?

Jesus said it so often. ‘Love one another.’ And “Even as I have loved you, so you must love one another”. And “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” etc., etc.

Do we get it?

Maybe not - Maybe that’s why Jesus said it so often, because Jesus knew we’d have trouble absorbing it – “love one another”

Do we “love one another”?

What kind of love is this anyway – not the warm, fuzzy, “It’s a beautiful day in this Neighborhood” kind of love And not the erotic, romantic, “Come aboard the Love Boat”, kind of love –

The love Jesus calls us to is sacrificial; it’s a costly kind of love – agape – and Jesus calls us to love EVERYONE with this kind of love

To love ALL – and to love ALWAYS – “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Sounds hard – Sounds SCARY

SCARY

MAYBE the opposite of this kind of love is NOT hate, maybe, as one writer suggests, the opposite of this love is FEAR.

How many people on the street, in the micro brewery on the corner, in the halls at school, in the break room at work would say about the “church” –

“I don’t feel welcome, I don’t fit in.”

And underneath those remarks – is FEAR – fear of rejection, or

Maybe fear of acceptance – what might being “the church” really mean?

And, how about us, right here this morning? Could it be that it’s fear that keeps us from imagining, from practicing that all-inclusive, sacrificial, no matter what, no matter whom kind of love?

FEAR – FEAR of losing our STUFF – tangible and intangible

If I friend HER on Facebook what will THEY think?

If we help EVERYONE who walks in the door – what will we do when we have nothing left to give?

I better lunch with management – If I hang out with THEM – it could cost me that promotion.

What is it that stops us from truly loving one another as Jesus commanded?

Fear of losing our possessions, fear of losing our reputation, fear of losing our friends, - fear of losing our STUFF -

If we could get over our fear, we would be free to do just about anything - even to go and sell our STUFF and give our money to the poor!

AND GUESS WHAT? - WE DON’T HAVE TO BE AFRAID.

So many times, in so many places – the Bible tells us “Have no fear” – “Do not be afraid”

We can be fearless - we CAN do this kind of love.

You know why?

Because it isn’t about US – or what WE can do – It’s about God and what God has done. God gives us what God commands of us - incredible but true.

In the Old Testament, in the book of Ezekiel, God says, “Get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!” AND in that same book, God says, “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you;”

God gives us what God commands of us.

We read in Ephesians that we are saved by Grace through Faith; AND that we are GIVEN faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit – God gives us what God commands of us.

If you love me you will keep my commandments might well be translated, SINCE you love me, you will keep my commandments - it isn’t conditional – we have nothing to prove – our ability to love is grounded in relationship – in our relationship with Jesus -

BECAUSE Jesus has loved us and loves us still – we CAN love Jesus and others – and we can even love them with the kind of love that would give up EVERYTHING – including life.

We can DO this love, as the church and as loved children of God

BUT... we might have to think a little about whose we are and what we are called to do.

I am reminded that Jesus' reference to "bearing fruit" in today's Gospel relates back to the Bible text for last Sunday where Jesus says, "I am the vine and you are the branches...those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit."

I'm thinking about what a vine looks like – individual branches are not obvious, or are obvious only in regards to how much fruit they are bear – mostly, though, the branches are all inter-connected, woven together, and around the vine – what if THAT is how we are to BE the church - how we are to LOVE – how we are to bear much fruit – woven together.

What if it isn't about any of us as individuals as much as it is about ALL of us?

All of us as the body of Christ at Christ the King,

All of us everywhere as beloved children of God, wherever we are in our faith journey –

All of us LOVING together – loving everyone – not as them and "us" – not as "insiders" and "outsiders" not as "contemporary and traditional" not as "male and female", not as "gay and straight", "not as young and old"

But as – WE – WE who have been and are loved by Jesus in the way the Father loved and loves the Son –

What if we remember that we are the branches – that the work we are called to do is about the bearing of fruit TOGETHER – not the building up of individual branches – yes we celebrate the very unique gifts of each person –Paul reminds us that we need all the individual parts of the Body of Christ – but mostly the WHOLE body together does the work – the branches are nurtured from the vine and bear fruit because of the vine.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you...

I am giving you these commands so that you MAY love one another.

You MAY love one another — We CAN love one another – we can love the world, we can bear fruit so that others might bear fruit.

We can do this because Jesus CHOSE us!

In John 15:16 Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I CHOSE YOU and appointed you to go and bear fruit— fruit that will last.

Jesus reached out to us – first. Jesus FRIENDED us – the vine friended the branches.

Why is that important?

Well, because frankly, as one preacher notes, "if most people knew what you and I were REALLY like... they wouldn't accept a friend request from either you or I. If people knew some of the things we've SAID/DONE/THOUGHT they wouldn't have anything to do with us.

But Jesus knows exactly what we're like... and He STILL friends us, still wants us as His friends. We hear it again and again ...

Romans 5:10 puts it ... "while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, "

Ephesians says it like this, "...but God, out of the great love with which God loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" Ephesians 2:4-5

We were enemies.

We were dead in our sins and messed up in our lives.

But it was then - when we were enemies of God and dead in our sins - that God sent us a "friend request."

We don't lack love so we CAN do this kind of love.

You know why?

Because, again, it isn't about US, the branches, – or what WE can do – It is about what God has done in Jesus, the vine...

BECAUSE Jesus has loved us and loves us – we CAN love others – and we can even love them with the kind of love that would give up EVERYTHING – including life.

HOW do we do this? WE JUST START DOING...Love is sacrificial action – it is committed, thoughtful, intentional "doing" –

C. S. Lewis in his book Mere Christianity – wrote, "don't waste your time worrying about whether you 'love' your neighbor – act as if you did. Do this and we learn one of the great secrets – when you are behaving as if you love someone, you will presently come to love him. If you do something good for someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him less."

SO how about it –

What if all of us branches...the old and the young...the long time members and the newbies, the BFFs (that's best friends forever for those of you who don't know) and those who are always on opposite sides of every question – what if we remember that our STRENGTH, our IDENTITY, our BEING is rooted in the VINE – what if we remember that Jesus said "I am the vine...and I have appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will LAST.

This lasting fruit will be produced as we PRACTICE love, so that we can DO love - love even in times of discord – it has been said that "Love among believers, especially in times of strong disagreement, shows the world the indisputable mark of a true follower of Jesus Christ."

Come on branches – we can LOVE! We can be AMAZING witnesses to the power and presence of Jesus Christ and our joy WILL be complete. Amen