

Love One Another

So let's say that some fellow inherited a few acres with a vineyard, but he knew nothing about growing grapes. He decided to use the tough approach. He walked up and down the rows of vines and threatened the branches that they had better produce good grapes, or else he would hit them hard with a stick. He realized that did not work so he tried a softer approach. He walked up and down the rows of vines encouraging the branches and telling them that he would give them a special treat if they produced good grapes. Finally, some neighbors shared some advice and he watered the vines and fertilized them. Soon, the branches were blooming beautifully and he had a plentiful grape harvest.

Last Sunday, we heard the first 8 verses of John 15 where Jesus called himself the vine and us the branches. He explained that when we were connected to him, then we would bear much fruit. Apart from him, we could not do anything. This week, as we continue with verses 9-17, we hear Jesus talk a little bit more about what that fruit will look like. We will show love to one another. Jesus did not threaten them as in, "You'd better love one another or I'll zap you." Nor did he try to bribe them by saying, "If you love one another, I'll give you special blessings." He simply stated what was going to happen. Since they were connected to him through faith, they were going to produce fruits of faith. Instead of growing grapes, though, his disciples would produce loving actions.

So many people, even many sincere Christians, do not understand the motivation for living according to the Ten Commandments. Most people think that Jesus gave us the commandments as rules to follow in order to earn our way into heaven. That won't work. Others think of them as bribes as in, "If you keep the commandments, you'll end up happy, health, wealthy and wise." No. Instead of threatening or bribing his disciples, Jesus fertilized and watered them with his love. Isn't it amazing that Jesus says (:9), "**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.**" That's amazing! Jesus was perfectly perfect. No wonder the Father spoke at his baptism and transfiguration and said, "This is the one I love." But the disciples were far from perfect. Grown men who spent three years walking and talking with Jesus acted like spoiled little children and argued about which one of them was the greatest. Even after Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples were still focused on earthly power and glory rather than the salvation of souls. When they got together for the Passover meal, the disciples refused to wash each other's feet. All the disciples said that they were willing to die for Jesus. But a few hours

later, when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, they all ran away. When Peter felt threatened, he even cursed and swore that he never even met Jesus. That Jesus would love these disciples as completely and unconditionally as the Father loved the perfect Jesus gives you a glimpse into God's heart. No wonder that John wrote in our first lesson this morning, (1 John 4:8), "**God is love.**" Not that God is loving or that he does loving thing. God IS love. Even though the disciples were stumbling believers, Jesus demonstrated his love for them by stooping down and washing their stinking, smelly dusty feet. But, of course, he did even more than that. He explained (:13), "**Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.**" Jesus was willing, even eager, to die for his disciples. His only concern was their salvation.

It's one thing to look at the disciples and marvel at Jesus's love and patience for them. It's another thing to realize that Jesus shows the same love and patience to each one of us as individuals. We are just as sinful as the disciples were. We are fundamentally flawed, infected with deadly sin. We are fixated on ourselves and making ourselves happy. We want things done our way and if they aren't, we usually argue or complain, or we keep our mouths shut while we fume inside and hold a grudge. We are often more focused on the things of this world than on our relationship with God. We rarely go out of our way to help others. And when we do, we usually whine about how unfair it is for us. We have not been great witnesses pointing people to Jesus. If we had been in that room with the disciples, we would not have volunteered to wash their feet either. And yet, Jesus promises that he loves you and me just as much as he loved his disciples, just as much as the Father loved him. Doesn't that just blow your mind and make your heart swell with excitement? In spite of all your sins, God loves YOU! Jesus' love for you is greater than any love from any human, greater than the love of the world's sweetest wedding couple, great than the love of a mother for her child. And just as Jesus was willing to die for his disciples, he was also thinking of you as he went to the cross.

As Jesus was hanging on the cross, God looked at Jesus and saw the disciples and you and me. He saw their sins and our sins and the sins of the whole world. As Jesus was hanging on the cross, God demonstrated his perfect justice by punishing sin in the person of Jesus Christ so that he would not have to punish you. You can be certain that your sins have already been forgiven. Your ticket to heaven has already been scanned and verified. As Jesus was on the cross, God looked at him and saw you. Now God looks at you and sees Jesus. When he looks at you, he sees someone as perfect as Jesus. None of us could ever have dreamed of such love from God. Our conscience constantly nags us. So, Jesus tells you clearly so you can be sure (:9), "**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.**" Wow! What Jesus

said to his disciples, he says to you (:15), **“I no longer call you servants. ... Instead, I have called you friends.”** Jesus calls you his friend, his buddy and pal! Who could ask for anything more?!? Such a blessing!!

Before God started creating the world, he worked out a plan to save you. We did not go crawling to Jesus to ask for his help. No. He chased after you. He explained (:16), **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit.”** The branches on a grape vine did not create themselves and decide to grow grapes. No. The branches grew from the vine and then they produce grapes, because that is just what branches do.

In verse 12, Jesus said, **“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”** In verse 17 he said, **“This is my command: Love each other.”** I wish the English language had a better word than “command.” “Command” sounds so heavy, like a threat or a harsh order. Think of it more as a commission. If you commission an artist to paint a picture of a beautiful sunrise over Lake Michigan, he does it because that is what artists do. Or, maybe think of it as a direction. You might pray, “Lord, I’m alive. I’m a believer and I’m also living in this world. How do those two lives connect?” His direction is to love one another. We see the 10 Commandments as guidelines for loving God and one another.

In our first lesson today, we see the fruit that a woman named Tabitha grew. She is described as (Acts 9:36) **“doing good and helping the poor.”** When Peter arrived, they showed him the robes and other clothes that Tabitha made. That was how she showed love. What are the grapes you produce? What are the loving things that you do because you are connected to a living and loving Lord? What fruits of faith do you produce? Our house should not be a battleground where everyone selfishly fights for what they want. Our house should not be a place where a husband demands that he gets his way or else. Or, where a wife nags her husband until she gets what she wants. Or, where children are only interested in what they want without ever thinking of the sacrifices their parents have made for them. Grandmothers should not be a bitter biddies who always criticize. Rather, we should take everyone’s words and actions in the kindest possible way, always assuming the best. Our home is a place to show God’s love, to show respect and concern for one another.

This love shows itself here at church as well as we interact with each other. In fact, Christ’s love for us should especially be seen here at church. Let us recommit ourselves to encourage, admonish, help along and strengthen one another. Our church should serve as a mutual support group for the family of God. I’m not picking on any one person, but it’s hard to support and

encouraged each other when you take three steps to get into church from the outside and then after the service you take three stops and you’re gone outside. Or, you only talk with the same people each week. I’d like to make a law (although that would go against the whole spirit of love), that after worship, everyone has to stay in the fellowship hall and talk for at least 10 minutes with someone they did not talk to the week before. That’s a large part of the rationale for remodeling our fellowship hall. We want it to be more comfortable and inviting. Speaking about remodeling the fellowship hall. This is a great way to show love to one another. There are as many ideas for it as there are members. It’s impossible to give everybody everything they want. Our love for each other is more important than getting our own way. If something does not go the way you or I would like, that’s OK.

Every day, at work and school and in your interactions with others, we have opportunities to show love and concern for others. If we are not moved to live in love, then there is something wrong with us. Then we need to look at Jesus again as he does more than wash our feet. He washed away all of our sins. When Jesus tells you to love one another, he is simply telling you to be what you are. It’s like telling a fish to swim. You do not have to threaten them. That’s just what they do. And Christians show love to one another. That’s just what we do. And if we needed any more encouragement, Jesus even said that the good works – the fruit – we produce will be (:16), **“fruit that will last.”** Others may forget that you’ve done anything good for them. Your financial offering to the Lord might seem insignificant because you do not have that much money to give. But God sees it and smiles. No one may notice how hard you work at being polite while someone talks and talks about something that doesn’t really interest you. But God does. And when you tell someone about God’s love and encourage them in their faith, that good work will grow dividends for all of eternity in heaven. As you put your faith into practice, as you interact with your family and others, you may not even notice or remember all the good things you do. But God notices and God remembers and God is glad. Therefore, my friends, be the Christian that you are and love one another. Amen.