

John 15:9-17

[Jesus is speaking:]⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I 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. ¹⁶You 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. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.”

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. [He didn’t want to get involved.] So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.” [He was just too busy and didn’t have the time to help.] (Luke 10:30-32). I’m sure that if you had asked the priest or the Levite if they loved God, they would have answered, “absolutely, positively, you bet I do.” Yet what they did, or rather what they didn’t do, said something quite different. Their words did not line up with their deeds. They claimed to have “love,” yet they did not show “love.”

“Love” is a funny little word. It seems to mean different things to different people. We believe we have the right to interpret what it is and who gets it. Or maybe more to the point, love is not always dispensed equally nor is it given to all.

What do you think of when you hear the word “love”? Do you think of a couple walking hand-in-hand on the beach? Do you think of Valentine’s Day and a warm fuzzy feeling in your stomach? Today we want to understand that such a concept of love is just a very, very small part of love. Today we want to explore the motivation of Christian love. This is a love demonstrated by Jesus. It is a love modeled after the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus makes it clear that

TO LOVE MEANS TO SERVE.

1. To our Savior Jesus, love was actions for unlovable, sinful human beings.
2. To us, then, love is also about deeds of sacrifice, even for those who are unloving.

1.

It is fitting that our gospel text comes from the apostle John this morning, especially in view of the topic of love. John is often called “the disciple of love.” It’s a subject that John brings up frequently. Throughout his gospel John never uses his own name. He always refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” And when you read the three short letters that John wrote, you hear the word love coming up again and again. John, however, is not tooting his own horn when he speaks of love. He is simply sharing with us what Jesus had given him.

So then, what was love to our Savior Jesus Christ? How would he define love? Jesus would not define love with words, but with actions: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3:16). **“Having loved his own who were in the world, [Jesus] loved them to the end. . . . Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet”** (John 13:1, 5). **“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation [the payment] for our sins”** (1 John 4:10). There you have it—that is love. For Jesus, love meant nothing if it was separated from deeds. Jesus didn’t just *speak* about love, he *did* love. Love for Jesus was sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed his time, energy, and personal comfort. Yes, he even sacrificed his very life.

Jesus gave all of this love to very unlovable, sinful human beings. Jesus didn’t choose people to love because they loved him first. The disciples weren’t too good at that. Oh, they talked a good game. The night of our text—early that night, that is—Peter and all the disciples were sure they’d make any sacrifice for Jesus, even die with him. Well, you know how that turned out. The disciples were good with love that was words, but when it came time for sacrifice, to put their lives on the line, even their words failed them. Remember Peter: “I don’t know the man. I don’t know the man! I don’t know the man!” No, Jesus didn’t choose to love the disciples because they chose to love him. He’s quite emphatic in our text: **“You did not choose me, but I chose you”** (v 16).

Are we any different than the disciples or any other people for that matter? Let's see. I too often am more concerned about myself than I am about my Savior. As a result, I speak harshly to those I profess to love. I too quickly place my priorities above God and soothe my conscience by saying that these matters are important and that God will understand. When we consider that even one sin should separate us from God, you have to wonder what God sees in us. Even though we may claim to be better than so many in this world who don't know who God is, the fact still remains – we are less than lovable.

But – Jesus *did* choose you and me—even though we were no more lovable and no more reliable than Peter. There are so many times when we haven't been so lovable, but Jesus says, “I love you—your sins are forgiven.” Jesus says, “I love you—here is some fish and bread.” Jesus says, “I love you—get up and walk.” Jesus says, “I love you—I lay down my life for you, my friend.” It is clear from Jesus' words and actions that “love” and “service” are joined together. To our Savior Jesus, love was actions – even for unlovable, sinful human beings – even for you and me.

2.

So then, in light of what Jesus has said and done, what is love to you? How do you define love? We can't define love with just words. We need actions. And there is the hard part for us. We know what the Lord says, but the “doing” is still hard for us. Oh, it's not so hard when we are dealing with people we really like – people who are kind to us, people who give back when we show love towards them. Yet we don't like every person in this world to the same degree, do we? The bully on the playground, the driver who cuts us off in traffic and endangers our lives, the person who ridicules God and suggests the church is a fraud because all it's interested in is money, the individual who takes pleasure in cutting us down whether there is a reason for doing so or not – you can fill in a couple dozen other examples, I'm sure, of other people whom we might call difficult, if not impossible, to love.

If we are to love, then we need to understand why we do it. Why do we love? First of all, we love because God commands us to love. It's not an option. Twice in our text, Jesus does not suggest that we love—he commands us to love. In verse 12 Jesus says, “**My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.**” And again in verse 17, he says, “**This is my command: Love each other.**” Secondly, people know the disciples of Jesus by how they love. We want to be recognized as Jesus' disciples, so we love. How do we love? We love as Jesus loved. Now that again is a pretty tough order. To love as Jesus loved means that we serve as Jesus served.

We love by sacrifice. We love not by words but by deeds. Jesus says, We love by laying down our lives for others. Not necessarily literally, but as we give of our time, our comforts, and our treasures, we are laying down our lives in love for others. When we, so to speak, “stick our necks out” for Jesus, we are laying down our lives for others.

Let me illustrate what I mean. What happens when someone you know, a friend, starts to misuse God's name because he or she is angry or upset or hurt. Do you bail out at the very time when you should tell your friend, right out loud, right there and then, “I love Jesus. Don't use his name that way.” Our Lord is always there for us, but isn't it amazing how quickly we can find what we consider to be good reasons for not being there for him. At others times we get in the way of love in dealing with ourselves. It is so easy to be selfish. “Lord, I will take every thing you have to give [and then complain that you don't give me more], but don't ask me give up something for you.” Or what happens when people talk to us and we aren't really listen to what they are saying because we are too busy thinking of what we are going to say. Doesn't love listen? Doesn't love require a response that is based on more than what I think is right?

If we are modeling Jesus' love, then we practice a love that doesn't desire but gives. We love not to *get* something but to *do* something. Maybe we shouldn't say, “I love you.” Maybe we should say, “What can I do for you?” The question that Jesus places before us is a hard one. Is love without sacrifice really love? May the Lord help us to wrestle with that question by looking back at Jesus, who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his live as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

There was a daughter of a princess who was deathly ill with diphtheria. The mother was forbidden to kiss the child because of the almost certain danger of contracting the disease. In one of the many moments of pain for the child, the mother was so distressed that she took her daughter in her arms and soothed her into quietness. The daughter looked into the eyes of her mother and said, “Mama, kiss me.” This was too

much for the mother's heart. She took her child, pressed her against her body and kissed her. It was a kiss of death. Love is sacrifice without counting the cost.

Whom do we love? Anyone for whom we sacrifice is someone we love, starting with our spouse, children, and friends. We can love people whom we don't even know. How many people give money for the relief of those caught in natural disasters? That is sacrificial love. We love those who do not love us. We love as we do deeds in the name of Jesus Christ. We love because Jesus loved us first.

The sacrificial love of Jesus is hard for us to do. It takes effort, practice, and concentration. It takes open eyes to see the needs of others. How can we better love those at home, at church, at work, in our neighborhood? Love with the love of Jesus. Love because he loved us first. To love means to serve. Amen.

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