

## “Love One Another”

### John 15: 9-17

I am having a déjà vu sort of week. I feel like I have been in this place before. I'm not talking about being in this sanctuary on a Sunday morning for worship. I'm talking about being behind this pulpit saying these words, over and over again, time after time: “Love one another.” I feel like this is what I say each and every week. And yes, I know I am probably preaching to the choir. I have seen this congregation time and time again live out this commandment, sharing God's love for all of God's people.

But like I said, it has been one of those déjà vu sort of weeks. Could it be that I feel like I say these words over and over again each and every week because somehow each week, these words are shared over and over again in the Scriptures we read, in the Scriptures that we say are the Word of God for the people of God? Sure, maybe not these exact words but when we read the Gospel words, whether they come from the Old Testament or New Testament, in some shape, in some form, it all gets boiled down to: Love one another as I have loved you.

I will tell you that these words hit home this past week. Sure I was on vacation but even on vacation, the world of technology finds us. My news feed was

full of stories this past week. Stories from 234 women and children rescued from Boko Haram, malnourished and clinging to life. Stories from riots in Baltimore, tearing communities apart. Stories from war ravaging countries around the world. Stories of how humans are adding to the wounds of the Body of Christ.

So many stories of hurt and hate, yet still, I find myself standing once again in this very pulpit saying the same words over and over again: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Why is it so hard? There it is in black and white. We can’t misinterpret it. Jesus says “Love one another as I have loved you.” We can’t pretend we don’t understand. We know what Jesus is talking about in this passage. He tells us plain and simple. “Love one another as I have loved you.”

And just in case we miss it the first time, Jesus goes on to say “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you”. Then he continues by saying: I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

How are we not getting this? As people of faith, we have one standard. To love as Jesus loved. All are equally accountable to this one standard as people who have claimed and named Jesus as our own Risen Savior. How are we not getting this? There it is in black and white. We can’t misinterpret it. We certainly can’t

pretend we don't know what Jesus is talking about when he says these words. He showed us just exactly how we are supposed to do this as his disciples!

We know exactly what he meant when Jesus said "Love one another as I have loved you". Everything Jesus did, everything he taught, everything he preached, every act of ministry Jesus did while here on earth, was an embodiment of these words. During his time here on earth, Jesus showed love to all. Jesus showed grace to all. We know exactly what Jesus meant when he said Love one another as I have loved you. Jesus even went as far as showing us how to live out this greater love to all by laying down his life for his friends, for his disciples, for us, the ones who claim him as our Lord and Savior. We know exactly what Jesus meant when he said "Love one another as I have loved you."

As I continue to hear all the stories of hate and hurt that fill our world, I just want to shout: "People, how are we not getting this? Jesus said over and over again, time and after time, in some way, in some form, "Love one another as I have loved you." People, how are we not getting this?

Over this past week, I have given some thought to this dilemma. Maybe we aren't getting it because it has become so ingrained in us that for us to function as a society there has to be insiders and outsiders, that there has to be people we love and people we don't love, that there has to be people we accept and people we

don't accept. Or maybe we are not getting this whole Love one another as I have love you thing because we think love is a limited resource. Maybe we have tricked ourselves into believing that if we share it with others, there won't be enough for us.

Or maybe the reality of it is the reason why we aren't getting this whole love one another thing is because it is simply too hard. It requires too much from us. It requires too much of us. It requires that we tear down the walls that separate and divide our communities. It means that we would have to start seeing each other as made in the image of God. It means recognizing that we don't get to pick and choose who is worthy of God's love.

Maybe that's the real reason why we really don't want to start loving as Jesus has loved us. Because if we love as Jesus loved us, then that means we aren't in control. It means we don't have a say of who is in and who is out. If we really started loving as Jesus loved us, then that would mean we don't get to choose who we will love just because they think and act like us.

But here is the thing we tend to forget when it comes to Jesus' command to love one another as he loved us. We tend to forget the fact that "when we invited Christ into our lives, he insisted that we let him bring his friends along with him."

And we all know who Jesus claimed as his friends right? Sinners, Tax collectors, Prostitutes, Lepers, and oh, yea...us.

Wait, what? You mean, Jesus lumps us, the people who are his followers, the people who claim him as our Lord and Savior, Jesus lumps us, his friends, together with all those other people. You mean, Jesus claims all of us, from his followers right down to those sinners he broke bread with, you mean Jesus claims all of us as his friends. No divisions, no special treatment, no extra perks?

I'm going to let that sink in for a moment. We cannot love Jesus and not also love those he loves as well. Jesus claims us all as his friends.

You see when it comes to God's love, we don't get to decide who is worthy or not. God does. And God has already decided that all are chosen to be named and claimed as God's beloved children.

As a child, I remember having conversations with my fellow playmates that went something like this:

“So and so said that she didn't like you.”

Well, that's okay, because I don't like her either.

But it says in the Bible that you are supposed to love everyone.

Well, I love her in that way, the way that Jesus says that I have to, but I don't really like that person

Did you have those conversations as well? I would always say, "I love that person like Jesus says we are supposed to love, but I don't really like her." Like that one phrase made everything okay. Like if I said that one phrase, then it really didn't matter what I did or said towards that person. I used that one phrase: "Love her like Jesus loves her" as my get out of jail free card and didn't really think what this one phrase meant for me as a person of faith.

Sure, I could use innocence of being a child as my excuse but I have seen the exact same behavior displayed by adults who have long moved past childhood.

You see, we all like to think there was a divide between the church world and the real world. And As long as we love this person, in the church world, it doesn't really matter what we say or do towards that person. It doesn't really matter because as you know, all God cares about is the church world right?

However the words of Paul, when I was a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, I acted like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. As we continue to grow in faith, we come to realize that there are not two worlds: the church world and the real world. There is only the one world in which we are called to live in as people of faith. It is in this one world, that we are

called to reflect God's love in all that we do and say. As we continue to grow in faith, we come to realize that we can't divide God's love to fit our needs, to fit our wants. We don't get to choose who is in and who is out. God's love just doesn't work that way. God loves us: the good, the bad, the ugly, the successful, the poor, the young, the old and all those in between. God loves us all! God commands us to love as God has loved.

You see the simple matter of it is we are connected to all through God's love. We are called to love all as Jesus loves us, no ifs, ands or buts. We are called show this love, share this love in this world with all of God's creation and by doing so build up the Body of Christ, bring healing and wholeness to all.

I find it fitting that this is our Scripture for today as we lift up the women in our lives who have formed and shaped us in our faith. I don't know if you are like me and didn't know the exact history behind the origins of Mother's Day. Sure I had an idea but not the complete history.

Mother's Day was started long before we all think. It was never supposed to be a commercial holiday. It started as a way to honor a movement started in West Virginia by Ann Jarvis who founded Mothers' (MOTHERS') Day Work Clubs. These clubs were created to improve the health and sanitation conditions for women and children. And they did for quite a while. These clubs changed lives.

These clubs transformed lives. These clubs improved lives, that is until war found its way to their doorsteps.

During the Civil War, the area where Jarvis lived became a strategic site for transportation and position for both the Union and Confederate armies. Soon the women who were part of these Mothers' Day Work Clubs began to choose sides. And here is what I love about the real story behind Mother's Day and the way it honors a call to love as God loves.

In the midst of the divisions that were preventing these life giving clubs from actually doing what they were supposed to do, Ann Jarvis made all the women "take a sworn agreement that friendship and good will should be obtained in the clubs for the duration and aftermath of the war and that all efforts to divide the churches and lodges should not only be frowned upon but prevented." In other words, Love one another as Jesus has loved us" And guess what, we are still in the aftermath of that war and so many other wars just like it. All the efforts to divide and separate should be frowned upon and more importantly be prevented.

We are called to love one another as God has loved us, here and now. It is up to us as people of faith to start sharing this renewable, life generating, healing resource with all of God's creation.

People of God, how are we not getting this? Especially now when Our world is so in need of understanding, is so in need of seeing, especially now when our world is so in need of experiencing the life transforming reality that love is not a limited quantity resource. It is abundant and over-flowing. Our worlds needs to know that God's love never runs out, that there is more than enough to go around. Our world needs to see what can happen when we all begin to love as God has loved us.

Perhaps starting today, we can celebrate the amazing gift of God's love and truly begin to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Perhaps starting today, we can embrace the connection we have with all of God's children and become friends. Perhaps starting today, we can all begin to live out the vision of what it would look like we all loved as Jesus loved.

May it be so...Amen.