

Show the World Jesus
May 10th, 2015

John 15:9-17
Easter 6 B

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As I mentioned a few weeks ago, the season of Easter, and indeed the entire festival half of the church year is winding down. We will conclude our focus on Jesus' works in the next week as we celebrate his Ascension during this week and next week take a look at the work he continues to do for us even now in heaven. And again, as we transition into the Pentecost time of the church year, we shift our focus from what Jesus did to a more primary emphasis on our lives for him now. We certainly don't leave Jesus behind or forget him. Every week, every day we remember what he has done for us, because as he told us last week, we are just the branches, he is the vine that gives us the strength to produce the fruits we will be looking at.

And so here today we look at the "command", the "*mandato*" in the Latin that Jesus gave to his disciples on Maundy Thursday. We look at this now for a few different reasons. First of all, the disciples' situation parallels our own. This was the last time Jesus would have to sit down and talk with his friends before his execution. He wanted them to have what they needed going forward during his absence. We, on the other hand, are about to celebrate Jesus leaving this world visibly at his ascension this week. In a way, we need to be prepared to live without our friend Jesus visibly present as well.

And secondly, perhaps more importantly, the reason we look at this now is because what Jesus says here, the command he gives and the directions surrounding it, completely encapsulate the Christian life. The person who could truly follow this direction would please God in all he or she does, literally never sin. But even though the direction is given so simply and in so few words, it is so profound that we spend all our lives trying to grasp the implication of every application of this command. And so weak are we in ourselves that we struggle to hold to this command for just one day even with the help of our Lord.

And so here, again, in short is what God asks of us in our lives today, just as he told the disciples that somber evening:
<Read text: John 15:9-17>.

"Love each other as I have loved you." There it is. Go ahead and do that, right? But as I said, simple to say, much more work to understand and actually apply in our lives. To begin to grasp what is being asked of us, we need to understand that truly the important part of this statement isn't really the part directed at you, but rather the part that gives us both the example and the power to do what is commanded. "Love each other" isn't so vital as "as I have loved you." Why? Because without the back half of this statement we not only have no idea what "love each other" means, we also have no *reason* to do so.

In fact, in this very section Jesus illuminates for us how exactly he has loved us so that we can apply that for ourselves. He tells us that the greatest love is that which lays down his life for his friends. Love is willing to give all that another might be spared. And that, of course, is exactly what Jesus did. We faced the death penalty for our selfishness. By nature, every act, every thought and word of ours is tainted with selfishness. Grabbing, taking, caring only that things get better for me. Oh I may give a little from time to time, but only because what I get back in material or emotional rewards is better than the payment. Other people aren't my concern unless being concerned about them makes me feel better enough to bother. This isn't just ignoring what God wants of us, this is flying in the face of it. This is defying his will completely. And we must understand this; every sin we commit is nothing less than a rebellion against our God.

Remember what happened to the first to rebel against the Creator? He was cast out of heaven permanently. He was cut off from God and his grace forever. And he was left to rot in eternal torment. That was the judgment. Instant and permanent for his rebellion. And how many times have you defied God? How many times over do you deserve the exact same fate? But this was how God showed us his love. Even though it was you who broke his law. Even though it was him you rebelled against. Even though you have no redeeming qualities in God's eyes. He still took your place. He stepped in and offered himself for the payment of your sins. He gave his life for you, his friend, that you might live.

And even now, you did not choose to take this payment from him. But instead he came to you, he found you and he chose you. In his love he sought you out with his word. He sent the Holy Spirit to work in your heart, and the Holy Spirit created a new life in you. A life that is truly alive. That will live forever in Christ. A better self who is able to live for him, empowered by him to act selflessly. He chose you that you would bear this fruit. This is his love for us. That he should chose to lay down his life, to die for those who hate him, so that they might benefit from his sacrifice. From his own death Jesus receives nothing he did not already have. But we are the ones who benefit completely. That is how love works. That is the love that Christ commands when he says, "Love each other as I have loved you."

Jesus is both our guide and our motivation. In him we now see truly what selfless love is. We don't understand this by nature, it doesn't just come to us without thinking about it, but with his example we can take the time to decide what is the truly selfless approach to our neighbor in every situation. And we have every reason to do so. To not only take the

time to think properly about what we should do, but to actually do whatever it is. To act selflessly, to give without profit for ourselves because in Christ we have all the profit we will ever need. His death means your eternal life. That won't be lost or taken from you no matter how much you give of yourself here. And so the things that we give, not only were they never ours to start with (which is an entirely different discussion), but all of them are things we can afford to give, because we don't need any of it. Whether it's our time or our treasures or our talents or our pride, it doesn't matter. We lose nothing of true value because that which matters is permanently ours in Christ. A life beyond this one, beyond the treasures of this time.

With all this in mind, and with these truths refreshed in us daily through his word, we are able, in Christ, to go forth and bear fruit. To do exactly what he has called and appointed us to do. Sin, that fruitless existence, is a prison. We have been set free to bear fruit. To live free of sin. To live without the burden of selfishness. To not have to be worked up over our own rights and our own pride. To stop insisting on what's due us and instead be happy and free to give of ourselves that someone else might be better. To do that even and especially when the other person doesn't appreciate or even realize the sacrifice we made for them. That is the fruit we bear in Christ. That is the freedom we are called to live in.

And even though I say that we bear this fruit willingly for no reward, the fact is that we have a reward. We do benefit and we are blessed by keeping this great command of Christ's. We see here that Jesus, Lord of the universe, decides to call us friends. And in him, that is true. Think about what a friend is. Someone you share yourself with. Someone who has similar interests or goals. And someone who watches out for you and you for them. This is our relationship with Christ. Certainly we are not equals, but he does call us friends. That alone is a reward worth having.

He also tells us that by keeping his commands we will remain in his love. Note that he doesn't say we will earn or merit his love. We already have his love. But by keeping this command we remain in his love. And this doesn't mean that his love is somehow contingent on our performance. But rather, when we defy his command, when we return to rebellion against him, we push his love away from us. We cannot save ourselves, we cannot choose Christ or merit his love. But we can resist him, and we can push him away. To stay in his commands, to love him and others is the opposite of pushing him out. It ensures that our faith will remain strong and we will stay close to him forever.

And Jesus promises another benefit of remaining in his love; our joy. In him our joy will be complete. Every time we think we need to push Jesus away it's because we are fooled into thinking something better is out there that he's trying to keep us from. Same tactic the devil used on Adam and Eve. But it's not true. The only thing that lies down that path is the burden of selfishness. In Christ we are set free and in Christ our joy is complete. It's only there that we're truly able to let go of all the things we think we need to fear and worry about and chase after. It's only there that we can let go and let God.

And as we walk this world for what remains of our earthly life and as we produce this fruit that comes to us from the vine, something amazing happens. The world sees Jesus. The fruit we produce comes from the vine of Jesus. We are simply the branches through which it happens. The fruit is from the vine, and so the fruit shows the vine. A grapevine produces grapes. An orange tree produces oranges. An apple tree produces apples. And so the vine of Christ produces Christ-fruit. The life you live for Christ shows him. Your selfless acts of love to those who don't deserve it show you to be someone different. How are you able to do that? How are you able to give so freely to those who may even hate you? How are you able to be so cheerful and smile when the worst of life piles on you? These are the questions that get asked when you show Christ to the world through your actions.

And they give you the literal chance to share Jesus with them. Because he is the answer to those questions. He may not walk among us visibly anymore, but he shows himself through you. And through you he can come to someone who does not know the freedom and joy he brings. By shining the joy of Christ in the world you can help another come to that joy too. Wear your faith on your sleeve so that everyone can see it and everyone can see Jesus through it.

Brothers and sisters, love each other. As God has shown you love, love each other. In this the world will know that you are Jesus' disciples. In this the world will see Jesus himself. And in this the people of this world will have the chance to know Jesus and be saved. They will have the chance to have their joy made as complete as yours is now. Live that joy. Show the world Jesus. Amen.