

John 15:9-17
"Life in the Vine"
Sixth Sunday of Easter (B)

May 5, 2024
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Jesus said: ***"As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"*** (John 15:9-10).

These are the words of Jesus on Maundy Thursday, which are known as His farewell discourse to which we began last week. It is remarkable that in just a matter of hours, Jesus will experience betrayal, abandonment, unlawful arrest, cruel abuse, and execution. Despite knowing what would soon take place, Jesus speaks of both His and His Father's love for His apostles and disciples. Today, on this Sixth Sunday of Easter, Jesus continues to speak about our relationship to Him.

And what is this relationship? Jesus is the true Vine, we are the branches, and God the Father is the Vinedresser. This is a relationship of life in the Vine. A relationship where we, the branches, never chose to be in the Vine, but the Vine chose us out of His love as His branches. For Christ says, ***"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide"*** (John 15:16).

Jesus never picked us because we were wiser, stronger, wealthier, or smarter than others. He chose you because He loves you. That love has its origin in Jesus being loved by God the Father. And this love's intention is that we, whom Jesus loves, will also love others.

From eternity, Jesus has been loved by the Father. This love is the foundation of all things. Love is the essence of the Holy Trinity. Before there were any created beings to love, the Father was always loving the Son. Love was the basis for creation. God who is love created precious creatures to love, especially the crown of His creation: humanity.

This God the Father loving God the Son relationship continued throughout Jesus' earthly mission. At both Jesus' Baptism to fulfill all righteousness and at His Transfiguration atop the mountain, God the Father called Jesus His beloved Son.

In this love, Jesus chose you and me, for He says, ***“As the Father loved Me, so I have loved you”*** (John 15:9). Remember, we never chose Jesus. As sinners, we do not have the will or ability to ever choose Jesus because our fallen nature only wants to flee from Him and all that He desires to accomplish with us.

Despite our sinful nature, Jesus loves you and me the same way the Father loves Him. So, just as the Father has loved Jesus, Jesus eternally loves us. He displayed this love when He ***“[laid] down His life for His friends”*** (John 15:13). Through His death, He won for His friends salvation on that cross! There, He took our dirty, wretched sin onto Himself, forgave that sin, and destroyed sin’s power over His friends. There, on that cross, Jesus chose us who were by nature His enemies and declared us to be His friends – and at the cost of His own life.

Jesus has chosen us, who were His enemies, to abide in His love! He says: ***“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love”*** (John 15:9). Now, what does abiding in Christ’s love look like? Well, it means that we abide in keeping His commandments.

Unlike the Father’s love for Jesus and Jesus’ love for us, our love for God and our neighbor often falls short.

Remember, Jesus is speaking these words on Maundy Thursday. Again, He was fully aware of what would soon happen. Christ foresaw how Satan would sow discord, anger, impatience, hatred, and envy among His followers. And unfortunately, Satan has never let up, as this discord, anger, impatience, hatred, and envy still remains. As branches connected to the true Vine, we must constantly be pruned and purged by God’s Law and Gospel, because we are simultaneously saints and sinners.

As branches, we face many daily frailties and shortcomings. Bumps and trials never cease, especially when we are living in this fallen world, which is led by the Father of Lies, Satan. Our flesh is weak. We get caught up in the devil’s poison and suspicion enters our hearts because of a single word or a single glance which stirs up mutual animosity. Satan is the master of this art. He employs his craftiness before anyone is really even aware of it. This is what the devil did in the case of St. Paul and Barnabas, who had a sharp dissention and parted ways (Acts 15:2). Trifles can lead to quarreling and enmity that only results in great harm. The blood begins to boil, then the devil shoots his venomous darts into the heart by means of evil tongues, and finally no one says or thinks anything good about the other. The devil keeps on fanning the flames and is eager to set people against each other and spread misery.

As branches of the true Vine, we must be on guard against Satan's craft and cunning. We must repel any suspicion and hostility that may be stirred up in us and remind ourselves not to let love depart and die out for this reason but to hold onto love with a strong hand. And if aversion and discord have arisen anywhere, we must restore and improve the love and friendship through forgiveness and reconciliation.

Love, on its own is rather easy. Love doesn't require any great skill, but remaining in love takes *real* skill and virtue.

In marriage, the husband and wife are initially filled with affection and passion, but later, they could become bitter foes. The same happens with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as they are branches of the Vine. A trivial cause may separate those who should be really bound with the firmest ties, but that trivial cause turns them into the worst and bitterest enemies. This, of course, is to Satan's delight and joy. You see, Satan strives for nothing else than to destroy love among Christians and to create utter hatred and envy. For Satan knows that Christianity is built and preserved by love.

Therefore, Christ admonishes us to solemnly and earnestly hold firm to love as His branches. Again, He places both Himself and His Father before our eyes as the most perfect examples: "*As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you*" (John 15:9). Jesus suffered and died for you, so that you would abide in His love.

Love is not doing whatever you want. Love is sacrificial. Love is caring. Love is disciplining.

As branches of the true Vine, we now abide in Him, lest we be misled by false doctrine and thus be cut off from Jesus. For wherever love and unity are destroyed and schism and discord take root, there pure doctrine disappears, and defection from Christ ensues. The branch cuts itself off from the true Vine.

So, **we must all examine ourselves**. For Christ says, "*If you are truly My branches, it will surely become evident that you are My disciples by your fruit. If you refuse to bear fruit, I will not acknowledge you and accept you as My disciples.*" So, how do we show ourselves to bear fruit? Well, right along with the Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5 are the Ten Commandments:

- First, you shall have no other gods.
 - a. Do you trust God for your financial security, physical safety, and emotional support?
 - b. Do you fear God's wrath in avoiding every sin?

- Second, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
 - a. Do you keep all the vows you have made in the Lord's name, such as confirmation, marriage and legal vows?
 - b. Do you carelessly speak or misuse God's Name?
- Third, remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.
 - a. Do you attend the Divine Service faithfully, or would you rather prefer to be elsewhere?
 - b. Do you pray for and encourage your pastor?
 - c. Do you support the church financially?
- Fourth, honor your father and your mother.
 - a. Do you honor all authorities as gifts that God has put over you?
- Fifth, you shall not murder.
 - a. Have you unjustly taken the life of anyone, born or unborn?
 - b. Do you hate anyone, or are angry with anyone?
 - c. Do you hold grudges or harbor resentment?
- Sixth, you shall not commit adultery.
 - a. Do you look at others lustfully?
- Seventh, you shall not steal.
 - a. Are you selfish, stingy, and greedy with your time and money?
- Eighth, you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
 - a. Do you gossip, listen to rumors, or take pleasure in talking about the faults or mistakes of anyone?
 - b. Do you speak truth in love, trying at all times to explain everything in the kindest way?
- Lastly, you shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.
 - a. Do you resent or envy those who have what you do not?
 - b. Do you encourage disharmony?
 - c. Are you manipulative or controlling?

To be good branches of the true Vine, we keep Christ's commandments. However, all too often, we fail to keep Jesus' commandment to love.

If you have failed to keep Christ's commandment to love, Christ gives us another fruit of faith. This fruit is repentance. You see, whenever we fail to abide in His commandments, in love Christ calls us to repent. When we repent, it is by God enabling us. He warns us by His Law, but then He makes His loving purpose immediately evident as well.

True repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution, that that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ, and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest. So now we are able again to bear fruit and abide by His commandments again.

Fellow branches, who are forgiven and saved, the love of Christ is transformational. The evidence of our faith – *our fruits of faith* – is seen in the changes that take place in our lives. God uses words like “born again,” “rebirth,” and “regeneration” to describe what Christ’s love does to us. Each time we repent, we are indeed “born again” in Christ to live out our lives as good branches that bear fruit.

In order to strengthen and increase our faith, love, and obedience, God gives us the Means of Grace – *His Word and Sacraments*. The Word of God together with the Body and Blood of Jesus under the bread and wine nourish us in love as the Holy Spirit transforms us in the Divine Service. We are transformed into desiring to keep Christ’s commandments, to obedience as evidence of our fruits of faith. ***“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome”*** (1 John 5:3). This is our life in the Vine. It’s a life of obedience and repentance, as we rejoice in God’s love for us! ***Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*** Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +