

**+ John 15:9-17 + What Does Love Look Like? + 6th Sunday of Easter + 17 May 2009 +**

Have you ever wondered what love looks like? Seems like a rather unusual question since “love” is an abstract thing. So for an answer, you might go online and google “how to describe love”. You’ll get 2790 results. On those nearly 3000 result pages, you’ll find countless definitions and descriptions of what people think love looks like, from the poetic, “My love is like a red, red rose” to the simple, “Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken”. It seems everyone thinks they know what love looks like, but no one can fully define it.

Then we read the Gospel Lesson this morning and Jesus says things like, **“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love”** and **“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”** We read these words of Jesus and they start to make us ask that question again—what does love look like? You and I start to wonder, “Do I really know what love looks like?”

We see the love of husband and wife. We see the love of parent and child. We see the love people have for a certain food, their country, or a favorite sports team, but what kind of love is Jesus talking about here and does my love look like that? You see, Jesus is talking to his followers here, specifically the Eleven—his closest circle of followers. They have celebrated the final Passover together. They have cleared the tables and cleaned the dishes, and the time has come to leave that borrowed Upper Room to go out in the chill spring air to make the journey to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has told his disciples to get ready to depart, because the Son of Man is about to be betrayed to suffer and die, but Jesus has some final lessons to teach. He urged his followers to remain in him using the beautiful imagery of a grapevine and its branches intimately connected. Now Jesus expands on that as he gives a final command, that they love one another.

...But what does that love look like? We hear Jesus again, **“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love...My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”** There are really three loves here, all interconnected. We start with the first love—the love of God the Father for God the Son. Now this love is different than your typical parent-child kind of love. It’s different because it’s perfect without the stain of sin. It’s completely selfless and self-sacrificing. This is the holy love of the Father that moved him to send to earth his only begotten Son to be sacrificed for a sinful world. Truly a self-sacrificing love when you realize this love is found in the holy mystery of the Trinity, where in a way God is giving up himself out of love for the sinful world. This is the love the Father proclaimed from on high as the waters of Baptism dripped off of Jesus when he stepped onto the banks of the Jordan River three years before this. **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased.”** This is the holy love of the Father who approved from Day 1 every thought, every word, every action his Son carried out, a love that moved him to accept Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection as sufficient for every one of us.

That takes us to the second love—the love of Christ for us. Think about this. Jesus didn’t leave heaven kicking and screaming. He went willingly. Jesus didn’t get a chip on his shoulder over the humbling reality of going through the growth process from womb to infancy to childhood to adolescence to adulthood. He went willingly. Jesus didn’t fight back when he was betrayed by one of his own, beaten, flogged, and ridiculed, treated with injustice by the religious leaders and the Roman government, and finally crucified between two common criminals. He endured all that willingly. Jesus didn’t scoff at the ridicule of the crowds, the rejection of his Father, and the punishment of death for sins’ guilt he didn’t deserve. He endured them willingly to the very end. Jesus didn’t surrender to death either, but defeated it by rising gloriously from the dead...willingly.

...But why? What moved Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to go through all that so willingly? **“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you...My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”** That’s where we come to the third love—our love for one another. Christ commands us to love one another with a love that looks like his love, which looks like his Father’s love for him, but my love doesn’t look like Christ’s love!

My love isn’t holy; instead it’s sin-stained and guilt-corrupted. My love isn’t selfless and self-sacrificing; instead it’s self-centered and self-seeking. My love doesn’t wonder, “How can I be a blessing to my spouse, my family, my co-worker, my classmate, my neighbor, my friend?” Instead my love always seems to be wondering, “What’s in it for me?” My love doesn’t go through tough times willingly or endure hardship willingly. My love complains and argues and fights back when life doesn’t go my way.

So when Christ commands me and all believers to **“Love each other as I have loved you”**, my heart condemns me because my love doesn’t look like his. I don’t remain in Christ’s love, but love with a love that is selfish and fickle and disobedient and weak, always looking for love in all the wrong places rather than the

perfect love of Christ given freely to me. Unholy love for self only leads to a love for sin to fulfill that love, a love which will only lead us to eternal separation from the holy, selfless love of God in hell.

So what does love look like? If you look at your own love, you'll see nothing, but pain and death, but Jesus doesn't leave you staring at your own weak, unholy, selfish love. He goes on and shows you and me what love really looks like. **"Greater love no one has than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."**

What? Jesus, what does true love look like? What is the greatest example of selfless love? **"...That he lay down his life for his friends."** Remember what Jesus was about to do. He wasn't about to go for a picnic in the Garden of Gethsemane. He wasn't about to depart for a friendly chat with the Jewish rabbis and the Roman governor. He wasn't about to go for a stroll down the Way of Sorrows and get a workout climbing Golgotha. He was about to be betrayed! He was about to suffer! He was about to die! He was about to go and show the world from the youngest infant to the oldest adult what true love really looks like. He was going to **"lay down his life for his friends"!**

Yes, **"his friends"**, those disciples who were about to abandon Jesus in just a couple hours. Filled with love, Jesus looked them in the eye and said, **"You are my friends...** I don't call you servants or slaves, but you are my friends! I have shared with you everything my Father has shared with me. I am going to lay down my life for you because I have made you my friends!"

...And that is what you are! The same Savior filled with love looks you in the eye through his Word and says, **"Greater love no one has than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends...** Your love is imperfect and unholy? See what holy love for you looks like in my bruised and bleeding body on the cross. Your love is selfish and self-seeking? See what selfless love for you looks like when I willingly lay down my life on the cross and take your place in the tomb. Your love is weak and fickle? See what steadfast love for you looks like when the tomb stands empty on Easter morn. **You are my friends...** In my Word and in Holy Baptism I share with you everything my Father has shared with me. In my Holy Supper I share with you myself, because you are my friends, not my slaves, not my servants, my friends. What's mine is yours and what's yours is mine. Now before you try to take some credit for our friendship, don't forget what I told my disciples on that night I was betrayed. **'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.'**"

Remember those 2790 Google results for "how to describe love"? Chances are pretty good that the people around you in your neighborhood, your classroom, your workplace, your community, maybe even your family really don't know what love looks like. So then how will they know what Christ's love looks like? What did Jesus tell us? **"Remain in my love...Love each other as I have loved you...You are my friends if you do what I command...I appointed you to bear...fruit that will last...Love each other."** How will the world know what Christ's love looks like? To mix pictures, the world will know by the fruit we bear as Jesus' friends.

People will know what love looks like through my own Christ-cleansed love for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Through my own Christ-cleansed love even for those who might seem unlovable. Through my own Christ-cleansed love for sinners like me, people who don't need another excuse to keep sinning, but who need the tough love of a Savior who removes the reason for sin.

The world gets to know what Christ's love looks like when you and I live like we actually are Jesus' friends and actually love one another. In a world that doesn't understand what love is, it is, therefore, all the more important that we as Jesus' friends love one another with that same selfless, Christ-like love. The Lord uses that love to provide opportunities for us to explain the reason for our love, that it's not some emotionally-charged self-infatuation, but Christ's selfless love for us. The Lord uses that love to provide opportunities to introduce that neighbor, that relative, that co-worker, that classmate to your best friend, Jesus. What a more loving thing can you do for those you know and love!

My dear friends, how do you know what love looks like? Look to the cross and the substitute sacrifice hanging there for you. How do you know what love looks like? Look to the tomb standing empty with the stone rolled away for you. How do you know what love looks like? Look to the hands and feet and side of the glorified and risen Savior scarred for you. How will the world know what love looks like? When we as friends of that same Jesus love one another. May God empower us to do that each and every day! Amen.