

King of Glory Lutheran Church
6th Sunday of Easter: John 15:9-17
I am the One Jesus Loves
Rev. Ruth Ann Loughry
May 5-6, 2018

When we know in our heads and know in our hearts, Jesus loves us, our lives will keep God's commandments and bear fruit that lasts.

As I prayed about you and prayed about what you needed to hear this weekend, I couldn't get away from where we began last weekend. "Abide in my love."

We all throw the word 'love' around like it's a tennis ball bouncing from one person to object to another. We love that couch. We love that car or the dog or our favorite pair of tennis shoes. Oh, I just love this dress. I love spaghetti! Loved that movie! I love my spouse.

We love lots of things. Fantastic! Our lives are filled with joy when we have positive feelings for fun things, people and activities involving food, entertainment, friends, culture, clothing, and that old saggy couch which all our mothers would tell us to get rid of!

But the love Jesus speaks of in John's Gospel is different. This love is unique. This love is divine in that it comes from God to us.

And Jesus says, "Abide in my love."

Remember last week how I mentioned that the word 'abide' also means to rest, remain, stay, live, endure, or continue?

So take a moment. Think backwards through your week. What happened? Where were there challenges? Where were there joys? Where are you tired? Where do you need hope? And as you are thinking about the events of your week, listen to Jesus saying to you: "Rest in my love." "Stay, pause... in my love." "Endure because I love you." "Live into my love. Explore it. Know it. Trust it. I love you."

For those of us who grew up in the church we may have heard it since we were small. "Jesus, loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." But nobody told us it was in John chapter 15 verse 9 did they?

For those of us who didn't grow up within church walls, we may haven't heard it very often.

For all of us – we need to continue to hear it. And yes, you've heard me preach a version of this sermon before, but is there ever a bad time to hear that we are loved?

Because outside of loving that old couch or the latest best-selling novel or movie on NetFlicks, when we begin to love people...well that's another story.

It's another story because we humans are complicated beings. We have motives – pure and not so pure. We have egos which can get in the way of loving with humility. We have complicated families of origin that have modeled to us healthy and unhealthy love. We're blessed if we find love. We're lonely when we don't. We're hungry to be loved and angered when rejected. We want to give love and have it given in return. We fight the truth that we are loveable and get tangled up in physical sickness and mental illness. Love is incredibly simple and it's inexorably complex.

But with God, love is well...one of my seminary professors' years and years ago, went to the chalk board and said, "Let's get one thing straight." He drew a huge arrow on the board, with the arrow pointing downwards. "Let's get one thing straight. God always comes down to us. We never have to get up to God. (He drew another arrow pointing up and then dramatically erased it.) God always comes down to us. Love comes down." Huge arrow again, pointing down.

He came down. We sing it at Christmas time. Remember? He came down that we might have love. He came down that we might have light. He came down that we might have peace. He came down that we might have joy. Alleluia forevermore. (ELW 253)

Doesn't say, "we must go up so that we can find love. We must go up so that we might have peace."

Oh but we try, don't we? We try to earn God's love by doing the right thing. By living the straight and narrow. By not gossiping at the water cooler. By making good grades and not getting traffic tickets. (There's another point on God's chalkboard.) Whew. As if our correct ethical and moral choices actually change the way God thinks about us. As if the arrow down is non-existent.

Then we think we can earn God's love even by going to worship. Or reading our Bibles. Or by praying our prayers. As if our correct ethical, moral and religious choices actually change the way God thinks or feels towards us.

God came down. God, the incarnate, love divine, all loves excelling, came down that we might have love.

Philip Yancy (*What's So Amazing about Grace?*) writes about this:

Not long ago I received in the mail a postcard from a friend that had on it only six words, "I am the one Jesus loves." I smiled when I saw the return address, for my strange friend excels at these pious slogans. When I called him, though, he told me the slogan came from the author and speaker Brennan Manning. At a seminar, Manning referred to Jesus' closest friend on earth, the disciple named John, identified in the Gospels as "the one Jesus loved." Manning said, "If John were to be asked, 'What is your primary identity in life?' he would not reply, 'I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, an author of one of the four Gospels,' but rather, 'I am the one Jesus loves.'"

Yancey continues: "What would it mean, I ask myself, if I too came to the place where I saw my primary identity in life as 'the one Jesus loves'? How differently would I view myself at the end of a day?"

Sociologists have a theory of the looking-glass self: you become what the most important person in your life (wife, father, boss, etc.) thinks you are. How would my life change if I truly believed the Bible's astounding words about God's love for me, if I looked in the mirror and saw what God sees?

Brennan Manning tells the story of an Irish priest who, on a walking tour of a rural parish, sees an old peasant kneeling by the side of the road, praying. Impressed, the priest says to the man, "You must be very close to God." The peasant looks up from his prayers, thinks a moment, and then smiles, "Yes, he's very fond of me." [What's So Amazing About Grace. Philip Yancey. Zondervan Publishing House. Grand Rapids Michigan. 1997. pp. 68-69]

Yes, he's very fond of me. Because I am the one Jesus loves.

Now listen to Martin Luther. "The sin underneath all of our sins is to trust the lie of the serpent, that we cannot trust the love and grace of Christ and that we must take matters into our own hands."

If you are hearing my words and you're having trouble believing that God loves you...allow this community of believers believe it for you, until you can.

For "I am the one Jesus loves." Say that would you? I am the one Jesus loves. I am the one Jesus loves. I am the one Jesus loves. I am the one Jesus loves. I am the one Jesus loves.

Jesus tells us, abide in my love. Let me love you. I won't wander away if you get angry at me, if you forget me, if you don't answer my texts. Stay in my love. It will change your life.

We're so used to the catch aren't we? We're accustomed to the 'but' or 'if' or 'you made me' and then suddenly the rug gets pulled out from under our feet.

With God, Jesus says, "as I abide in you." And "Abide in my love." And "I love you."

The great theologian Karl Barth wrote pages and pages in his text Church Dogmatics (meaning great church truths) and he finally came up with a definition of God, "the One who loves."

Take a look....(slide show)
AMEN.