

Sermon: May 5, 2024

John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have 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. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Paying It Forward

In today’s gospel, Jesus opens up his heart to his friends and disciples. “I have chosen you,” he tells them, “Over and over, I have chosen you...even when you don’t choose me. Always, always.... I have loved you.”

Today, Jesus chooses us again. Jesus loves us and longs for us to love him with the same passionate, vulnerable commitment. And it’s not just the love between him and us that is at stake. The source of all love is God, and if we cannot live lives of love, it impacts our relationship with God, the Source of all Blessing and Joy... “Just as God has loved me, so I have loved you,” he says.

We are called to pay it forward. To take the love we know we have been given and invest it in the future—by changing one life at a time for the better. We don’t always know how our words or actions change the world around

us, but we act in faith that they do... that's what it means to abide in love... to let God's love live in us and make our hearts God's own home.

And how do we do show God's love to one another? We already know the answer. Follow God's commandments. The way we live is a reflection of our love and our love is dependent on the way we live. When we live in love, our lives are filled with loving moments – towards God, towards, Jesus... and towards each other, here and out there.

Jesus obeyed God's Commandments to the very end. He kept in constant connection with God through prayer, through loving communion. Even when he was abandoned in the Garden of Gethsemane and left to die alone on the cross, he did not give up. The cup was not taken away; he drank it to the bitter dregs. He knew that, despite everything, God loved him... he loved God and he trusted God... and he loved us enough to put his life on the line.

"By this we know that we love the children of God," writes John, "when we love God and obey God's commandments."

No wonder Jesus is so sad that his followers cannot follow him. We should be so overwhelmed by this promised love that it drives us to our knees. We should be so thankful that we open our arms wide open. This is the kind of love that opens up the opportunities to listen with new ears, see with new eyes, understand with a new heart.

"Abide in this love," Jesus tells us. Live in it and let it live in your heart. Let it become every part of your being – body and soul. Claim it as your own.

It all comes down to love.

Who do we know that lives this kind of love. What stories do we carry of those who live lives that embody a faith filled with abiding love? History... our own lives are filled with those stories of those who have found that Love has everything to do with it! Some are known and passed down, generation

to generation. Some acts of love, change those who are there but the stories fade in time.

Edith Stein lived this kind of love. She was born into an orthodox Jewish family in Germany but was influenced by the suffering of World War I and the writings of St. Teresa of Avila. In 1922, she was baptized and began the process of becoming a Carmelite nun, taking the name of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. In 1942, she was executed at Auschwitz because of her Jewish heritage.

She is quoted today for our Daily Meditation, when she wrote "My longing for truth was a single prayer"

In the days before she died, her faith gave her what she needed as the world darkened around her. Survivors reported that on the train to the death camp, she brushed young children's hair, sang to them and showed them love as their own mothers sat frozen in terror. As she faced her own execution, she took Jesus as her model, and prayed for those around her, including her captors.

"My longing for truth was a single prayer"

She knew that in God, she could change hearts and pour the love of Jesus into a world sickened by violence, indifference, and fear. When she was confronted by inhumanity and brutality, even as she suffered the same experiences the others were suffering, she was able to love and serve those around her. Her faith persevered and stayed strong... to the very end.

"Abide in this love," Live in it and let it live in your heart. Claim it as your own.

That voice is with us always, living deep within our souls, and all we have to do is learn how to tune out the noise around us and listen to that loving, God-filled voice.

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

Our experience of love is not just a “me and Jesus” moment. For love to live on, it must be shared... passed on... paid forward.. growing with each act of love. Just as we are loved, we are expected to reach out and share our love with each other. “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

St. Teresa Benedicata devoted her life proclaiming peace and love. St. Teresa of Calcutta devoted her life to the care of the poorest people in the world. Martin Luther King Jr. devoted his life to freedom and justice. Today we are called to continue this legacy of love – here in this place and outside these doors

You don’t have to lay down your life to devote your life to the one who loves you. Every time you reach out to one who is hurting... every time you volunteer to help someone out... every time you hold someone in prayer... When you put your faith in action, you are devoting your life to the one who abides in you.

As Jesus told us - When you feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, give clothing to the needy, visit the sick and the prisoner... when you do all these things, you live out God’s love.

When we deny the love that lives within us, when we turn away from our sisters and brothers, we are denying God, who wants so much to live within us.

So let go of all that holds you back, do not be afraid. Listen to God’s holy words to you: “I love you, I want you. Go out and show how beautiful this love can be whenever it is shared.” Amen.

Invitation to Give

It is one thing to memorize the words of Jesus. But it is another thing to let those words transform us and rearrange our priorities and our lives. In these moments for quiet and reflection, what is it that God is inviting you to rearrange about your priorities? What is it that you want to offer to the Church and to the world as a practice of God's love?

Blessing the Communion Table Cover

O Source of all Blessings, all things come from you and are woven through with the wonder of your beauty, so that we might be drawn more deeply into your presence. You have set this table before us so that we might celebrate your extravagant love and recognize your presence in our very lives through the sacrament of the Holy Communion. Bless now, we pray, this Communion Linen-- woven with gold strand as a reminder of your wondrous beauty. As we gather around the Table, may we recognize the wonder of your presence and the renewing refreshment of your people. To you be the Glory, in the name of the One who calls us to this place. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Invitation to the Table

Hymn of Preparation What a Friend We Have in Jesus?

Setting the Table

One: Grain is gathered from the field; threshed and milled for flour.

All: We are formed from the grain of God's harvest.

One: Flour is mixed with water to produce dough.

All: The water of baptism unites us.

One: Yeast is added to transform the mixture.

All: The vision of God's realm draws us onwards.

One: Oil softens the dough and makes a new texture.

All: The Holy Spirit anoints us as the body of Christ.

One: A little salt improves the taste.

All: Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth.

One: The bread is kneaded and shaped, molded and baked.

All: It is God who makes us a Holy Communion.

One: Grapes are harvested and crushed for juice.

All: You are the vine, we are the branches, O Christ.

One: Juice and skins are mixed with yeast for fermentation.

All: God's reign is coming. God's hope is here.

One: There is a time of waiting; then a time of pressing.

All: God's new life presses forth through the sediment of our lives.

One: And finally, the feast is here!

All: Let us celebrate the feast of our life in God.

The Story

The Meal

The Prayer

All: O Jesus, our beloved Savior, we thank you for inviting us to your table and sharing your feast. May we know that we have been fed with love and grace, and may we follow you out in the world as beloved friends. Filled with your Spirit, may we share your promises of hope and peace with our sisters and brothers, as we also share the prayer that you taught us...

Lord's Prayer.