

John 15:9-17 (New International Version)

⁹"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you obey my commands; you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this; that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

**This is the Word of God and it can be trusted.
Thanks be to God**

I am the vine and you are the branches. . . These are the words that Jesus used to begin a dialogue with his disciples as they traveled from the city to the Garden at Gethsemane. The purpose of this object lesson was to foster an understanding of their responsibility to their call from God in the days to come. These nine little words served as a reminder that their relationship with Christ was two-fold; they were to remain in him just as he would remain in them. Just as they were reminded in the Garden some 2000 years ago, we are reminded today that we, too, have a two-fold relationship with our God. We are to remain in him through the study of his word, his commands and his teachings, while he remains in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We derive our whole life from him; we are who and what we are because we are in him and he is in us. Without him we are nothing and can do nothing; remaining in him, we are called and enabled to bear fruit that will glorify God.

Last week's teaching was from the gospel of John Chapter 15 verses 1 through 8 and are only the beginning of what Jesus is beginning to teach us about our relationship and responsibility to

not only him, but to each other. Before continuing this morning with Jesus' teaching, let us pray that God will open our hearts, our ears and our minds to his purpose for these words today. Let us pray:

Dear Heavenly Father,

We recognize and acknowledge that you are the true vine and it is your Spirit that sustains us in our daily lives. Without you, we are nothing. As we listen to your word today, help us to learn more about your commands, your will and your purpose for our lives.

Open our hearts today that we may be sensitive to your calling; for we know that you have a plan for each one of us. Open our ears that we may hear your word in just the way you have intended it for us today so that we may find joy and hope in your word; misinterpreting nothing. Finally, Father, we ask that you open our minds that we may find understanding and meaning for our lives in your message today.

These things we ask in Jesus name, giving you the praise, honor and glory that you deserve. Amen.

The depiction of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, “. . . I am the vine and you are the braches. . .” is very easy for us to embrace. The image of the vine and its branches suggests an intimacy in the relationship between us and Christ; one that gives us comfort in knowing that Christ is a part of our lives. In its simplicity, however, it does not tell the whole story. As it is offered through the imagery of the vine, the teaching is rather impersonal. The object lesson of the vine serves merely as a means to introduce a lesson that has much deeper meaning for the disciples and for us. Jesus, like any good teacher, is building a schema between what the disciples know and what they are about to learn. The statement he makes to them next is of pinnacle proportion: he tells his disciples, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.”

In John’s gospel, the relationship between Jesus and his Father is seen to be of the deepest, most rewarding nature. In John 5:19-20 Jesus states, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the

Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.” In these lines alone we see that Jesus works together with the Father, doing nothing of his own initiative. He acts and speaks only on what he literally sees and hears from the Father. He lives on the principle of explicit revelation and implicit obedience. So when Jesus tells us that he loves his own just as the Father has loved him, we are perhaps lost for words and taken back . . . can that really be true? Do we and can we have the same relationship with Jesus that he himself has with the Father?

The answer is most assuredly yes, it can be and it is! The love of Jesus for all his people is of the same nature as the love between the Father and the Son. Being loved in this way, we are caught up into the very life and love of God in a most deeply personal way. The object lesson offered to us by the vine and branches might have seemed simple and merely functional. In the lines that follow, however, beginning in verse 9 we see that Jesus’ teaching has given way to a single statement of glorious

reality; we are loved by God with a love that reflects the relationship of the Trinity.

Last week we were offered insight into the inner workings of the process of bearing fruit by exploring briefly the Trinity. "For effective fruit bearing we need our **structural faith connection** with Jesus the Son of God, we need the **vitality of inner life** given to us by the Holy Spirit, and we need to welcome the **painful pruning** of the Father." What at first may have been merely interpreted as a Trinitarian workforce, has now developed into something more. Before anything was spoken into being, the Trinity existed and there was love between the Trinity. That is why love exists, because God is love. 1 John 4:8 states "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

Rather than continuing to concentrate on each individual role of the consciousnesses that comprise the Trinity, we begin to see an underlying driving force of each role begin to manifest. That is, we begin to see that there exists a loving, nurturing relationship within the inner workings of the Trinity and we have been extended an invitation to enter into relationship and

reconciliation with our God through the love that Christ has showed us. God is love and we are made in the image of God, therefore it reasons that not only are we a reflection of our Creator, but a reflection of his love.

While the truth of the promise of that love is secured and set; our enjoyment of that love is not a static relationship. Jesus calls us here to, “. . . remain in his love, just as he remained in the Father’s love.” To accomplish all that Jesus did in the name of the Father, he had to remain obedient to his will. Just as Jesus obeyed his Father, so we are to obey the commands of our Lord.

The reality of a dynamic relationship with our Lord does not suggest a faith by works theology in which we earn his love; that could never be and would utterly rob love of its meaning. In essence, the enjoyment of his love for us is conditioned by our obedience to his commands, that is, “This obedience is not what makes [us] friends; it is what characterizes [friendship].” (Carson).

So what are we to gain from this teaching? We are to gain the realization that by taking Jesus at his word and remaining in

his love through the obeying of his commands, his joy will be in us and our joy will be complete (v. 11). Isaiah 53 describes the Messiah as a Man of Sorrow. However, much of the writings of the gospels portray Jesus as a man of such gladness of Spirit, such freedom and openness and magnetism in His attitude, that He was simply irresistible. Why else would these 12 men drop everything and follow him? Why would crowds of people gather to hear him teach and to follow him wanting for more? Jesus was a man of great joy in his relationship with his Father. In remaining in his love by obeying his commands, we too can share fully in that same joy.

To place Jesus at the center of your existence, to give your all for God, is not to suffer loss; it is to gain great joy. The vision of the International Christian Community Churches is to build and foster faith communities where the Kingdom of God will break forth. It is equally so with this Community of Faith. New Day Worship Center of Toccoa exists to build and foster individual relationships with Christ; to offer an opportunity for individuals to

reconcile their relationship with their Creator through the joy and love offered through Christ our Redeemer.

New Day means just that, a New Day. When our Lord and Savior suffered and died on the cross, he did so in obedience to the will of his Father. He knew that there was work to be done. On the third day following his death, Jesus rose again and provided us with the hope and assurance of a new day. With each new day there is a renewed hope for the peace, love and joy that a relationship with our Christ Jesus offers us; a promise of a reconciled relationship with God our Creator, through the shed blood of Christ our Redeemer, encrusted by the all comforting and sustaining power of the Spirit.

So what of the commands we are to keep? Just exactly which commands are we to obey in order to remain in his love? There are many commands in scripture and we are to take all the word of God seriously. Jesus here, however, summarizes his desire for us to obey his commands in this way; "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." (v. 12)

In summary, Jesus echoes the words he spoke to them in chapter 13 when he says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (v. 34, 35). Our love for each other must rise above mere sentiment; it is instead to be patterned on and reflect the self-giving sacrifice of our Lord for us. "Greater love has no one than this; that he lay down his life for his friends. . ." (v. 13).

Why does Jesus reduce his commands to this; to love one another? Why not the command to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength? To love the Lord our God is presupposed. Without the desire to love God we would not be seeking relationship and reconciliation. Our love for one another is a manifestation of our relationship with our Creator. The book of Romans states that, "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10) and love, as Paul writes to the church of Colossae, "binds every other virtue together in perfect unity" (Col. 3:14).

The call for us to love each other is made on the basis of the example of Jesus. Not only has he instructed us to "love each

other as he has loved us," but he laid down his life for his friends and it is important that each and every one of us present today know that we are his friends by the grace of adoption.

We have tested and seen that the Lord is good; we have been rescued from our sin by a love which went all the way for us. Experiencing the love of Christ and rejoicing in it gives us a power and energy for us to love one another.

We are loved by Jesus as his friends and are called to love each other as he has loved us. Our Lord has brought us into the most rewarding relationship imaginable. In verses 15 and 16 Jesus explains to his disciples why he is now calling them 'friends' and what it means for their mission. Recall that Jesus has already told the disciples that he is going away, but they are to carry on his Father's will.

Jesus tells the disciples that they are no longer servants but friends on account of what he has revealed to them: "I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." In calling them friends he has not abandoned the object lesson he offered to them earlier of the

vine and the branches. Though they are his friends, he is still their Master. Servants are not privy to the business of their master. They are no longer called servants because they have been brought into the truth that only friends know – but Jesus remains their Lord and he remains our Lord today.

As we've seen, fruitfulness is a very comprehensive notion. His purpose is that we should bear fruit that will last – seeing the gospel make a lasting impact in the lives of many people.

With this in mind, Jesus reiterates that we can petition the Father and he will give us whatever we ask in Jesus' name. As we seek to do his will, as his friends, reaching out to others, we can ask for whatever we need and be assured of God's help, according to his purpose.

With this emphasis on the outreach of the church it is no accident that we are all gathered here today. We are a community of Faith that has been brought together for the encouragement of one another, for the encouragement our own communities and to bring the love of Christ to Toccoa, Georgia. There are many who have never known the love of God in their

lives; many who do not know what it is to experience the love and relationship that many of us have with our Christ. As a result, they themselves are unable to fully love one another; to carry out Jesus' command.

Maybe you are one of those people here today that has never come to know Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Maybe you have been convinced by the world that you are unworthy of his love; undeserving of his forgiveness and grace. I am here to testify to you today that **you are loved** and **you can be forgiven**. The grace of God is for all who are seeking and the promise of his love can be yours today. As we sing our sermon Hymn today, I ask that if you have a need for reconciliation with your Creator through Christ Jesus our Redeemer and seek the sustaining comfort and joy that is offered to you by the Spirit of God, then I ask that you please come forward today. I'd like to pray for you.

In addition I would offer up to you today that I am a firm believer in "once saved, always saved." I do not believe that there exists a power greater than that of our Creator, offered to

us by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. There is no power that can rob you of the gift of eternal salvation. I do, however, believe that there exists a power and a presence in this world that can keep you from experiencing the full blessings of God in your life. If you are experiencing a road block on the path that God has laid out for your life or you have found yourself on a misdirected detour, you can overcome these this morning.

So whether you are seeking a new found relationship with Christ or are seeking a renewed, clearer vision for his purpose in your life, I ask that you come forward today as together we sing Hymn #142, My Jesus I Love Thee. Please stand as you are comfortable.