

SERMON FOR SUN. MAY 9, 2021

Easter 6B John 15:9-17 “The Fruit of Love”

Dear fellow redeemed of the risen Lord, we heard last week that to remain as branches in Jesus the vine means life and fruitfulness. Not to remain, by means of His Word and Supper, means fruitlessness and death.

Today Jesus says to us, **“Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept the commandments of my Father and I remain in His love”**

Once again, Jesus speaks about remaining, about an ongoing life that can be sustained only by the love of the Father in the Son for us. Our life in Christ, our life together, is sustained by His love that never ends, never fails, never refuses to forgive.

But if love among and between Christians—if love in all its practical, physical, and actual forms does not flow from the love of Christ for us, we might well test the strength of our connection to the Vine.

“By this, all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for each other.” “These things I command you, so that you love each other.”

Love is the evidence of faith; faith works itself out in love.

Unbelievers can do works that are good in the eyes of people. So, if we see good works, there may not be faith; but if there is true faith, there will be love generated good works.

This love, these good works, are the **“much fruit”** of which Jesus speaks. The one whom Jesus loves, who lives in constant dependence upon the life of the Vine, keeps and rejoices in the commandments of Jesus, which are summed up in the single commandment: **“love one another just as I loved you.”**

Such love is the fruit of the Spirit, in all its forms: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

The fruit of good works is always concrete and specific. In our Lutheran confessions, we read that good works include, but are not limited to, **“such as to call on God, to have patience in suffering, to love the neighbor, to engage diligently in legitimate callings, to be obedient, to avoid evil lust, etc.”**

It is clear that we can bear no fruit, if the light of the written and preached Word does not shine on us, if we are not watered by the baptismal Faith, and if we are not nourished and fed by the most intimate and physical gift of Jesus in His Supper.

Yet, let's be clear; it is not our love shown in good works that takes away sin.

That is impossible since we do not have love except because Jesus first loved us by laying down His life on the cross; and there is no greater love than the Lord laying down His life for His subjects.

Nonetheless, we cannot pretend that we have the love of Jesus in us if we do not love one another.

Luther warns us, "***Therefore it behooves everyone to search his heart and examine himself. Let no one bank on thoughts like these: 'I am baptized and am called a Christian. I hear God's Word and go to the Sacrament'***"

Those comforting and holy things—baptism, Word, Supper—are meant for those who are distressed and disturbed by their sin and beaten down by the afflictions of the devil and the world; they are not meant for those who are spiritually lazy, fat, and comfortable, who have become gluttons of God's gifts but refuse to share them with anyone else.

The gifts of God, which we receive primarily on the Lord's Day, are meant to drive us, clothed in constant prayer, back out into the world: into all the places in which our daily life takes us.

When Jesus says that He has appointed us to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, we "*need not*," as Luther puts it, "***go to Rome or to Jerusalem, but [we] are to go to [our] neighbor.***"

Our Old Adam/Eve is always trying to invent bigger and better works of love than the ones God has already given us. We keep looking beyond our ordinary, daily works to invent special, extraordinary, and exciting works.

Why? Because real love is hard. It's hard to love day after day and do the things required of us, even more so if we do not take refuge in the Word and our prayers.

We see evidence of how hard this love is in the Church when pastors or congregants look for greener pastures. Rather than loving and serving in the place God has put us, we fantasize about that perfect congregation where everyone thinks like I do, and does things the way I would do them.

That is a form of spiritual lust—to look for another church because we don't want to do the hard work of loving people here and now. Spiritual lust, like physical lust, tears at the bonds of love, and it can turn love into spite and contempt.

On the other hand, being too comfortable with the things of God, like an old, loveless marriage, can cause us to snip and cut at the branches in our own area of the Vine.

We speak sharp words with an untamed tongue, thinking they will not be heard by the people about whom we are talking. But in a congregation, if we say critical things to one person the bad news will, eventually, get back to the person we've been badmouthing.

Do we build up the Body of Christ by spreading our frustration, dislike, and ridicule of someone for whom Christ died?

If we treat other people, and especially other Christians, as unworthy of our love and concern, St John's words apply: **Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

There is only one way out of our lovelessness: confess it. Repent and be renewed in the love of the Vine.

Come and be refreshed as the life of the Vine flows into tired, weak, and love challenged hearts. He will fill you up with all His goodness, so that your good works bless the lives of others.

The rhythm of the Church of God reaches its highest point at His altar, that place where heaven meets earth in the crucified and risen Son, who gives Himself in love for the life of the world.

As God restores us to holy communion with Himself, He is also restoring our fellowship and love with one another.

From this altar, where the Church on earth comes closest to full heavenly communion with angels and all the company of heaven, she moves in love and prayer back out into the world.

Of His mercy, He strengthens us in faith toward Him and in fervent, passionate love toward one another, all those for whom Christ died.

At this altar, in the glorious shadow of Christ crucified, we see most fully and personally the love of Jesus for us, as He gives us the fruit that falls from the tree of the cross.

As we feast on that fruit, He strengthens us to bear the fruit of His love in the world. As our epistle lesson said, **"this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."**

His commandments are not burdensome because we have nothing to earn by them. We have already overcome the world in Christ, who overcame the world by dying for it.

All, both our visible good works and our hidden sin, is covered by the blood of Him who chose us for His own.

As John said, **“In this is love, not that we have loved but, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

And remember, we did not choose Him, nor could we, but He has chosen us. And He has appointed us, the members of His Body, to go and bear fruit.

To go into families, businesses, and friendships, the places where He has already put us, and bear fruit that will remain—even into eternity as He shines through our words and our actions for the good of His people and testimony to His goodness for those who do not yet know Him.

This is what we pray for and it is what Jesus promises that we will have. We pray that God would give us more love, so that our fruit will abound. Give us love for each other: pastor for people, people for pastor, Christians for each other.

And God is eager and willing to give us that love. So, we trust and pray, so we come, so we are refreshed and enlivened, and so we love—

for the sake of each other and so that as many as possible might know the cross-shaped love of Jesus; so that unbelievers might look at the branches whom the Vine has made members of Himself and say: **“See how they love each other!” AMEN**