

Sermon on **John 15:9-17** for Confirmation Sunday on 5-6-18
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN – Pastor Nate Scharf

I have loved you. Remain in my love.

⁹ *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.*
¹⁰ *If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my*
Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ *I have told you this so that my joy*
may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² *My command is this: Love*
each other as I have loved you. ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down*
one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command.* ¹⁵ *I 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. ¹⁶ *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed*
you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever
you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ *This is my command: Love each*
other. ¹

Something big is happening today, Confirmation Sunday. It’s one of those days that you’ll remember for a very long time. You probably will not remember every word I’m saying to you in this sermon, but you’ll remember some of the thoughts, the sights (all dressed in white, a corsage, your opportunity to stand in front of the entire congregation to be welcomed into it as not just a member but an instructed, examined, communicant member ready to receive the gift of the Lord’s Supper and to take a more responsible role in the life of your congregation). You’ll recite or read your Bible passage. (Write it in the front of your Bible and label it so that in 70 years when your kids are looking for a Bible passage for your Christian funeral they can easily find it.) Pictures will help you remember all that is going on today. Pictures yesterday, probably a few today. Maybe some of your parents like just one or two pictures, others a 100.

The disciples didn’t need a camera to remember this day. They could sense that this was a big day. It was Maundy Thursday. They celebrated the Passover festival, a festival everyone looked forward to, commemorating how God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt through plagues, the blood of a lamb shed so God’s wrath passed over, and the crossing of the Red Sea. Family,

¹ *The New International Version.* (2011). (Jn 15:9–17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

friends, believers all gathered together kind of like at Christmas and Easter – just fun and basking in God’s love and praising him with songs and Scripture readings. Tonight, though, Jesus was dropping spiritual bombs on them left and right. He told them how he was going to die for them, that they wouldn’t see him for a while. He was “going away.” He wouldn’t leave them as orphans. He promised them, “Because I live, you also will live.” He said his father’s house has many rooms. He tells them over and over again about his Father’s will, how they’ll do great things, “remain in my love.” “Follow my commands if you love me.” This was getting serious. Jesus would send a “helper” – the Holy Spirit. Love one another. I chose you. He says all these things. Throughout the evening they would ask a question here or there, but they quickly realized something much more serious than just the Passover celebration was going on. And they didn’t fully understand it, yet. But they would.

Jesus said, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept the Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”* He says, *“I have loved you.”* We can’t even fathom how deep his love. We can’t estimate how high it is or measure how wide or long it is. As the Father perfectly loves his Son and does only what is best for him and for his people and purpose, so the Son of God loves you.

Jesus said, *“Remain in my love.”* Jesus told Nicodemus, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). So how will they remain in that love? Moments before he told them (v.8) that keeping his commands was proof of their love for him. Here he tells them it is a condition of remaining in his love to us. To say it simply, Jesus sacrificed himself for us sinners so that not only do we have forgiveness and eternal life, but that we will follow him, trust him, and serve him. But we can only do this connected to him and in his love and power like a vine feeds its branches. We remain in his love and it shows.

A couple of weeks ago, area athletic directors called a special meeting. We had just received over a foot of snow in April – spring season. Game after game, match after match, meet after meet had to be rescheduled, because teams couldn’t get out and play. The teams wanted to play, but couldn’t. Now, boom, the seasons are upon us.

Here now Jesus tells the disciples it is the season opener. They are on his team. *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I 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.”* He calls them “friends,” and he means it. And the rules of “the game” he’s setting them loose with – the law of God. Walk in his commands. The law of God serves three purposes for us – first as a curb – to keep society in order and keep us from gross sin with fear of punishment and consequence. But for the Christian we also know it is a mirror that shows us just how sinful we are and how totally corrupt our nature is. It shows the poor batting percentage and how many errors we have accumulated. We need to see it, not so that one day we’ll be perfect in this life or one day we’ll earn our spot on God’s team. If that were the purpose of the law, we will either realize we will never be good enough for God’s team and we quit it because we feel we should be kicked off, or we trick ourselves and act like we are one of the best players and fake it until we make it, secretly looking over our shoulders to see if anyone realizes the truth. The law is not our means to appease God. No, God is right with us only through Christ’s work.

Jesus tell us, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.”* You are sinners. You deserve eternal damnation. If you deny that, you are lying to yourself. But God has loved us so much that he sent his Son to pay the debt of our sin and endure the curse our failures and sins of thought, word and deed deserve. Jesus suffered and died for you, for you. And he rose again. You are forgiven only through his blood. In his unmatched mercy he chose you to be on his team and to bask in his love. Galatians 3:27 tells us, *“All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* He put us on our team, washed us clean of our sin and robed us in Christ’s righteousness – a perfect jersey. And he puts you in the game of this life to live for God by his commands and to serve your neighbor, even willing to love in such a way that you *“give up your life for your friend.”* The law serves as our guide to serve him and our neighbor to the greatest extent.

“And so whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.” God is there to help us in this. He will help us hold on to the Bible’s teaching in a world of untruth, bold opinions without merit, and emotion. God is there to help us put

others first, not as doormats, but showing that agape love that seeks the good of one's neighbor even at a cost to the giver. He will help you witness to the hope that you have – that we have a God who is love and a God who saves. Ask Him. He's there for you. He'll give it. You are in his love. You are a branch connected to the life-giving vine.

Today is a big day. It was for the disciples as they would go to the Garden of Gethsemane and learn the extent of Jesus' love for them. Today we bask in Jesus' love and forgiveness and we heed his call to follow him and his Father's will for us – to live for the one who loves us, to die for our neighbor, because we know on whose team we belong. We bear fruit not because that will make us Christians, but because we can't help but do them as Christians. And this brings us Jesus' joy and contentment and it makes our joy complete. **“I have loved you” he tells us. Remain in his love.** Amen.