

Sermon on **John 15:9-17** – Confirmation Sunday, 6th of Easter
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

Confirmation Weekend has arrived. After careful study of God's Word over the past weeks and months and for some of them – years, after careful examination from their pastors and witnesses, these confirmands are ready to make their confession of their faith and promises before God and the congregation, promises of lifelong faithfulness to our Lord and his Word. Younger Christians will look with wonder and excitement as they look forward to the day they'll get to stand and confess after careful study of the Word. Older Christians take reaffirm in our hearts the very promises these confirmands speak today, promises we once spoke years ago. Jesus' words before us appointed for the sixth Sunday after Easter show what lies behind this relationship we have with our God right now and eternally and Jesus' will that we always remain in him. It's love. It's Jesus love for us. Jesus says:

Remain in my love.

1. I, Jesus, love you.

2. Love one another.

“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 my 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. 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. 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. This is my command: Love each other.”

How do you show someone you love them? Some people think of Gary Chapman's five love languages – “Quality Time, Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Physical Touch, Gift Giving.” For Jesus – it's for you to **remain in his love**, and to do that is to follow him, to obey him, hold to his teachings, stay connected to Jesus. Jesus pictured it for his disciples – *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned”* (John 15:5-6). Now he shows another facet **“Remain in my love.”**

“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.” You have learned God's commands well – The first chief part of the catechism is The Ten Commandments. During examination a parent is asked for a number between one and ten. Then the confirmation student is asked to recite that command, and give the explanation whether in the words of the catechism or in their own, showing that they have them in their head and in their heart. (Usually parents pick the number four for whatever reason.) Why did God give us these commands? Commandments 1-3 are how you show love and gratitude to God and stay close to him – Love him as your only God and put him first. What he says overrides any thought or feeling of ours. Don't misuse his name, but call upon it. Remember the sabbath day – be regular in hearing his Word and setting time aside in our busy days to focus on him and his love for us – come together as believers to worship. Commandments 4-10 are how we live in love to our fellow man. We honor our parents and those in authority. We listen to them and thank God for them. Reminder: you might not always have them around. Use your bodies rightly. Don't hurt one another, but live in peace and help one another, even enemies. Use God's gifts as they are intended – intimacy is for marriage, not before or outside it, no matter what society says or does. Don't steal from the government, from your neighbor, from anybody. Trust God and be content. Don't tear down other's reputations, but build them up. Don't covet the things in your neighbor's life or the people. Trust God to provide what you need. This is God's will for you. It is good.

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” Jesus found joy in loving his Father and listening to the Word – going to the Temple, learning and teaching in its courts, going to the synagogue each Sabbath, as was his custom, honoring his Father as the only God even when hungry and in the desert. He found joy in loving his fellow man – not indulging in sin, but eating with the tax collectors and sinners that they might turn from their sin to the light of God's Word and their Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus ate with Pharisees and teachers of the law, confronting the self-righteous attitudes, turning them to see his

Father's heart for all. All are saved by his grace. This was his joy, and he did it perfectly. He wants you to have that joy.

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." It was no mistake Martin Luther placed the **Ten Commandments** at the head of the catechism for teaching young people and those new to God's Word. It shows the wisdom and will of the one true God in his plan and purpose for us and our lives, a will we pray each day God aligns us with. But it also reveals something we need to deal with as spotlights around a mirror illumine all our facial imperfections, so the law reveals how often we have failed to keep God's will for us, even though it is plainly before us, and even the basics are written in our hearts as our consciences confirm. We learn how unworthy we are of God's love on our best days, and on our horrible days. We are damnable sinners. It's why we confess it before God each time we come into his presence.

We don't come in as self-righteous Pharisees into his presence mistakenly confident of our own supposed righteousness. We come as beggars with empty pockets and nowhere to go. Then we have hearts and ears ready to hear what our God has done for us. We confess the **Apostles' Creed** which shows us who our God is and all he's done for us – an identity – a creation of our Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, set apart as God's own child by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. We rely on that relationship and with confidence pray the gift of the **Lord's prayer** calling on God as our own dear Father. We rejoice at the thought of our **baptism** – we are children of God by his grace and we bring our babies to the font. We approach in awe as Jesus gives his own body and blood in the **Lord's Supper** to give to us and assure us that even we are forgiven. We receive **the keys** as ones who know forgiveness that we can forgive like Jesus letting repentant people know they are forgiven, but warning the impenitent to turn from sin and unbelief. Jesus loves all and does not want any to be lost. He tells us so.

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." There is no greater love that the world knows or will ever know than that Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, laid down his life for sinners like, Peter, John, Judas, Pilate, you, and me. He shed his blood to appease God's wrath over our sin. He suffered the hell we deserved, the separation from God as he was forsaken on that cross. And your sins, my sins, are forgiven, fully and freely in Christ Jesus. And he rose to prove it. You see how ardently Jesus wants you to **remain in his love**. In him you have forgiveness, life, and the assurance of eternal life. You have purpose, identity, the truth. Outside the circle of his love you have lies, disappointments, false hopes, false knowledge, worldly wisdom, and eternal death. But Jesus has rescued you from all that. He says **"Remain in my love."** **Jesus loves you**. He laid down his life for you and took it up again. You are forgiven and you belong to him as his baptized child. Now **love one another**.

"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. 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. This is my command: Love each other." Jesus raises us up not as slave or servant to his master, but by his grace and boundless love, we are friends of our master and Lord. We see our purpose. We know what he wants of us – to stay connected to him and his Word, to learn better every day how to love because we are loved. We are different from the world. We are set apart. We are his. We are loved. We are connected to the only vine that gives life and we bear fruit. That fruit is our works of love as we follow his commands and truly love our neighbor. This is not earning salvation. No. Jesus did that. We love because we have been saved. We did not choose this life, but God chose you, just as Jesus chose his apostles. It's all by his grace. So confess this. Make your promises and live this. Why? Because Jesus loves you. *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now **remain in my love.**"* **Jesus loves you. Love each other. Amen.**