

Easter 6 – May 5, 2024

Text: John 15:9-17

Theme: Checkbooks and Calendars Speak Louder than Words

Love is perhaps the most misused and misunderstood word in the English language. We love our spouse and kids. We love our parents and siblings. We love God. We love pizza. We love our favorite movie and of course I love my dog, Zeke, but one would hope that there are substantial variations in degree between all that love. Boys and girls tell each other that they love the other , but each walk away thinking something quite different from the other. Little children tell their parents that they love them and are probably more sincere than almost anyone else because their love for their parents is so rooted in their love for God.

All of the above is why, when Jesus tells us to remain in his love, he doesn't drop it there. He defines and describes the word love so carefully and so thoroughly that frankly Jesus makes all other instructions look vague. But, if it were not for his careful explanation of the word love, how would we know what he meant?

He tells us that the way we remain in his love is by obeying his commands. If you love me, you will obey me. He knows that talk is cheap. Look at the religious surveys out there today that say things like 80% of Americans believe in God. 67% of Americans pray every day. It's easy to check a box on a survey form. It's not

quite as easy to put it into practice. If 80% of Americans believe in God then I figure we should have about 3,000 people here for worship this morning. Where are they? Did we forget to unlock the front doors? No, they're sleeping soundly in their beds, leisurely reading the paper while eating fresh bagels and drinking Starbuck's, watching, or playing sports.

Now let's see, they believe in God, but he's not a high enough priority to take time out of the week to worship, study, or praise. Do see the irony of that statement? I believe in God but I don't follow His command to Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. That is just why Jesus said, if you love me, you will obey me. Action speaks louder than words. If you tell your children that you love them, but you choose to drive a fancy car or go on expensive trips instead of providing food and housing for them, how long will they believe that you love them?

If I want a clear idea of what or who a person loves, I don't need to hear him speak. Just let me see his checkbook and his calendar. Checkbooks and calendars speak volumes. If something is truly important to us, we will make time for it and we will spend money on it. Jesus knows this. He has died and gone to Hell to provide for us the Christian life, and he has no intent for us to treat this life as though it were some shallow, insipid following of a

traditional pattern. Remaining in Jesus' love is not about form and tradition, it is about living in an obedient relationship with the one who provided the life for us.

Now, why is our remaining in his love so important to him? Why is it that he even cares if we devote large chunks of our lives to him? What need has he for us? He tells us, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Jesus is like a master teaching art to a student. Now the master knows that the artist creates art and finds joy in the creating. Our joy in the Christian life will only be complete when we devote ourselves to the practice. In fact, the majority of the joy of Christianity is found in the practice of Christianity. As we practice our faith, we find that the Christian life is characterized by inexhaustible power for fresh creation and the world is our canvas.

Many people in the world live their whole lives bound by many limitations. They are confined to a prescribed life by ligatures more powerful than iron. They are bound by selfishness and so cannot reach outside to others. They are bound by greed and so will never know contentment. They are bound by hate and bitterness and so will never feel the delirious joy of fully and completely loving another human being. And I will tell you from personal knowledge these are not just people outside the church.

Satan is never happier than when he can slip some of these cords of death around our necks too.

Well, as any football coach will tell you, a good offense is the best defense. So, Jesus carefully explains what love is. Love is obedience to God. We do love whether or not we feel love. Love is action. Love, at its apex, is Jesus Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. When we know that love is not an emotion but an action, the power is unleashed. We are freed from the snares of Satan, and we have the inexhaustible power for fresh creation, a new canvas anytime we want one, the complete joy of true love.

This all sounds fantastic. We would line up for this. But then the harsh realities come crashing down. People are cruel. Situations are bad. Children are naughty and parents fight and teachers are unfair and pastors let us down and politicians stab us in the back and friends gossip and, and, and....well, the harsh realities come crashing down. So, Jesus tells us one last thing. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

There's the fresh, creative power to live a life remaining in Jesus. Remember that it was not we who once thought Jesus would be a good idea and so created him to save us. It was he who came down from heaven, took on human flesh and decided that dying for us would be a good idea. Lest we ever begin to imagine that we are somehow on our own, struggling through life and doing our best to do the right thing, remember, you are chosen. So, stop, take a deep breath, and begin at the beginning.

Remain in His love. Make the necessary corrections in your calendar and in your checkbook. Be sure that you are living in a loving relationship with Jesus. Now the rest is easy. The rest is pure joy - pure artistic creation. Now life almost becomes a game of seeing how much we can love. How often can we set ourselves aside and place others first? How often can we build another up? How much lasting fruit can we bear before our time is up. When we die, no one will care how much money we had or how powerful we were, or how often we were right. All they'll care about is the fruit we leave behind, the lasting fruit, the fruit that flows from and remains in Jesus' love.