

**John 15:9-17**

**As the Father has loved me, so also I have loved you. Remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you hold on to my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have held on to my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you these things so that my joy would continue to be in you and that your joy would be complete.**

**<sup>12</sup> "This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this: that someone lays down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you continue to do the things I instruct you. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will endure, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>17</sup> These things I am instructing you, so that you love one another.**

Dear members of God's family.

How often do you think about when you were little – when you were a baby or a toddler or in Grade School? Do you remember what you were like 30-40 years ago or maybe 10-15 years ago? Do you remember the years of your youth when you started out life in your mother's arms being rocked to sleep? Do you remember the first day you went to school and your mom watched with tears rolling down her cheeks? Do you remember the years of your parents carting you off to different activities like band, soccer, baseball or piano. Truth be told for most of us we look back at those years and say wouldn't it be great if we could go back in time and become a young child again. Why couldn't we stay that age forever? Life was so simple, but the fact is that we can't stay young forever. But honestly, we realize that we didn't really know much back then and we have changed, I pray for the better, over these last years of our lives. We have grown up physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

That exact thing happened these last weeks to some of the young people here at St. John. Over the course of the last few weeks 13 young people were Confirmed where they made their public declarations of their faith. In a way we could correctly say that they were showing to us and themselves that they were growing up spiritually. These young people were baptized into God's family and over the years in Sunday school, Christian Day School, Catechism Classes and in their homes have seen their faith grow up right before our eyes. There is no going back -- they are moving past the years of their youth in a spiritually way. They are not grown up, but it is a great thing to watch as their faith has continued to grow and will continue to grow long into the future. And much like physical growth which we cannot stop, we need to remind ourselves that our spiritual growth never reaches an end.

Today, with Confirmation Day still fresh in our mind, we hear Jesus' special words of encouragement for them and for all Christians as we continue our spiritual growth. John writes, "**Remain in my love.**" It is that thought of God's love that we are going to dwell on today using the theme:

**Theme: God Loves Us!**

- 1. Remain In His Love**
- 2. God give us his love in his Word and Sacraments**

If we are going to talk about God's love and John tells us. **"Remain in my love."** we have to ask ourselves, "What is God's love?" Jesus gives us a hint with the Greek word he uses for love: **"Agape."** Agape love is selfless. It is a love that gives and does not seek anything in return. Agape love is pure and has unselfish motives. This is the kind of love Jesus has for us. How did he demonstrate his love to us? I think we know the answer and Jesus gives it to us in verse 13, **"No one has greater (agape) love than this: that someone lays down his life for his friends."** That's about the most unselfish, humble and generous thing we could do for our friends. How many kids would take their friend's place in detention or the principal's office or sitting in their room grounded so they can go out and play? How many adults would trade places with someone in jail? Probably not many of us. But this is what Jesus did for us. He was punished as our substitute for our sins. He died in our place. He suffered hell for us. That's agape love!

But what does it really mean to, **"Remain in my love."** This is more than a phrase. This is a lifestyle. It means that for our entire life, we will allow the love that Christ showed to us to show itself in the way we love others. We will always keep Christ's love in our thoughts, on our lips in all of our actions. To remain in that love, we will make the most of every opportunity to come into contact with Christ's love. We are doing that right now, by being in worship, by participating in the Lord's Supper, by attending Sunday School, Adult Bible study, by studying the Bible in your home with our family. Sounds easy, right, to remain in Christ's love?

The problem is there are enemies out there who don't want us to remain in Christ's love or to show that love to others. Our number one enemy is Satan. He will tempt us with all sorts of "fun" activities to make sure that we no longer show the love of Christ in our life and to ensure that we stray from Christ's love. One of the ways he will try to accomplish this is through our "friends" who really aren't our friends.

This applies to both young and old, Here's how it may go in our own lives... our boyfriend or girlfriend may try to convince us that since society says it's ok, having sex if you're not married is an acceptable thing to do. Our friends will encourage us to rebel against mom and dad's rules, because parents just don't understand. Our friends might try to convince us that it's ok to go against the rules of our government because we are just exercising our 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights. Our friends will convince us that staying up late on Saturday nights and sleeping in on Sunday morning is OK because we can watch Livestream whenever it is convenient for us – rather than making god first in our lives. Our friends will convince us that spending more time with them and video games and music is more important than some quality time with God's Word and in prayer. Pretty soon we might find ourselves no longer feeding on God's Word but starving ourselves or at best eating as little as possible of God's Word as we see fit. Eventually we might forget who our true friend is and what he did for us 2000 years ago on a cross outside of Jerusalem.

To remain one of Christ's children will not be easy. If we are true to ourselves and honest with our lives and actions, I think we all have to admit, that by our actions, our thoughts and our words that we already have not shown Jesus' love to others. I think that we would have to admit that we have not always allowed Christ's love to feed our soul. That's when God's law hits us like a sledgehammer. He should no longer call us his children, but enemies. For not following his commands he should no longer make us members of his home in heaven but residents in hell for all eternity. The threat of God's wrath beats us down, it condemns us, it exposes our sinful behaviors. That's when you and I, in humble repentance, need to admit our sins, and turn to Jesus, and seek his forgiveness. And if we should ever wonder, "Does Jesus still love me? Does he still call me his friend?" He says to us, "I do love you. I have always loved you. Yes, you are my friend. Look! I'll prove it to you! I laid down my life for you."

## 2. God give us his love in his Word and Sacraments

Think about this. Would we lay down our life for our friends? Let's say that a group of your friends is crossing the street and you see a large truck barreling down the street. Would you risk your own life to push your friends out of the way, or would you dive out of the way to save yourself? That's a beautiful picture of what Jesus did for us. An oncoming "truck" was zooming down on us: God's wrath was coming, headed straight for us, to smash us to smithereens in hell for all eternity because of our sins of not following his commandments, for not showing his love in our life, for following the ways and ideas of this sinful world. But Jesus pushed us out of the way and let himself be punished by God's wrath, to be tortured, to experience the pains of hell for us, to die for us, to rescue us from God's wrath. That's agape love. And Jesus never asks us to pay him back – because we cannot. He does not set a condition on his love. He says, **"Remain in my love."**

He gives us all a special gift to remain in his love: the Means of Grace; the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Maybe we know of a classmate in school who is failing math or social studies or science. The teacher assigns a tutor to help that student so she or he doesn't fail. In the same way, Jesus knows you and I cannot stand up to Satan's temptations all by ourselves. He knows that we will fail on our own. So he offers us the Means of Grace to forgive and strengthen us. The Means of Grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Through his Word, Jesus lifts us up with these words, **"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."** (Romans 1:16) He says, **"Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away."** (Acts 22:16) He says, **"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."** (Matthew 26:28)

The Gospel in Sacrament... Through baptism as Jesus reminds us over and over again that our sins have been washed away and that a new person has been created in us who wants to do Gods' will. The Gospel in Sacrament . . . Through the Lord's Supper where in a few minutes you will have a taste of the heavenly banquet that Jesus is preparing for you. In this sacred meal, Jesus offers us to eat and drink his body and blood with this bread and wine, and through it offers us forgiveness, salvation from sin, death, and the devil, and offers and grants eternal life. Jesus gives us the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to remain in his love.

So to those who were just recently confirmed and are just beginning their earthly journey (spiritual toddlers and teenagers) and to those of us who have been around the proverbial block, don't forget God's love. Be faithful with our participation in the Lord's Supper. Be faithful in our worship and Bible study attendance. Be faithful in our home Bible studies and don't just read his Word, study it, meditate on it, pray about it. Because we know that to remain in his love, the next 10-20 years, the next 60-70 years, will be difficult. Satan will try his hardest to drag us away. Remain faithful and we will remain in Christ's love, and Christ will remain in us. May the Holy Spirit through his Word and Sacraments strengthen us to remain in Christ's love all the days of our life until eternity. Amen