

**May 6, 2018 Sixth Sunday of Easter
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GOSPEL

John 15:9-17

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the fifteenth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants[a] any longer, because the servant[b] does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

The gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ.

"If you only had one moment to prepare someone for the rest of their lives, what would you say?" Perhaps you could imagine yourself speaking to your child or loved one, and in that conversation, you're

trying to give them the wisdom they need along their path, knowing they have to walk that path alone. Or perhaps you could imagine speaking to a younger version of yourself and getting one chance to prepare yourself for life's challenges.

That's the question Jesus is answering with today's Gospel text. Jesus has just finished washing the disciple's feet, and in the context of the Gospel of John, he knows what's going to happen next. Jesus is worried, but not for himself. Jesus is worried, that when he lays down his life for his friends, the disciples won't understand why. He's worried that the disciples are woefully unprepared to face what comes next and he's doing his best to guide their future. He's trying to warn them of the danger ahead and trying to encourage them through it.

After he finishes drying their feet, he warns them of betrayal and hardship, of the coming of the Holy spirit, the true vine and branches, and the way the truth and the life. More often than anything else Jesus repeats his greatest commandment over and over, like a mantra or a motto for life. Jesus says: "Love one another."

Our Gospel reading today begins with a word not often used in a sentence, unless you're a fan of the Big Lebowski. "Abide in my love". In Greek, the word used here is 'Meno' which means to "remain", "continue to be present", and "not to depart".

This takes place right after Jesus compares himself to a vine and calls the disciples to be the fruit bearing branches. Jesus asks us here to live everyday within the presence of God.

The greatest commandment, loving one another, abiding in love, we've heard this before. As Christians we sing and read and talk about love so regularly that it's easy to let words like this slip through our minds as business as usual. Of course we should love each other. Of course we

should abide in the love of Jesus. However in the context of 2018, in our own present lives, what does that look like?

I think in the nature of everyday life, the easiest lessons we can learn are the ones that we can see in our everyday lives. Many times when reading the verse “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” I’ve heard people make comparisons to military or public service, such as firemen, police officers, and soldiers. I think it’s natural for us to see the presence of God in the presence of our loved ones and those who care for us. Of course, there’s no better example than the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. For me personally, these verses remind me of my step-father.

For those of you who don’t know, I did grow up a child of divorce. While it can be a difficult subject to talk about, I thought it might be helpful to relate today’s text to my life experience, so I hope you’ll bear with me.

My Mother, my sister and I were on our own by the time I was 4 and my sister was about 1 year old. My mother was a hard-working self-sacrificing pediatrician born in Lima, Peru, and while my sister and I had some yearly visits with our father around alternating holidays, we were missing an everyday father figure in our lives. That was, until around when I was 6 years old, when my mother married my stepfather, Mark.

Step-parenthood is rather common in our society but very seldom talked about. Many times, it can be awkward to mention to new people. Comments like “You look just like your Dad!” can be met with an uncomfortable silence. I don’t think anyone in their formative years says to themselves: “I want to be a step-parent when I grow up.” I’ve grown to deeply respect those who take on the enormous challenge of step-parenthood; It’s a tough job. You take on a whole range of new

relationships and responsibilities, and there's really no standard for how to make it work. The whole family has to take on new and difficult questions that aren't easy to answer. Simple things we take for granted become complex, such as the question "What do I call you?"

However for me, the answer to that question was "Dad", simply because he was. When I think back to who helped me learn to tie my shoes and ride a bike, I remember my Dad. When hearing Jesus's words of "Abide in my love" and "Love one another" or "lay down one's life" I think of my Dad. My Step-father's love for me was one of my first conceptions of what real love was like. My Dad wasn't one to wax fancy words or give elaborate gifts. He didn't think my jokes were particularly funny, and he hated it when I asked a million questions when he was trying to watch Star Trek. However, he gave me love in a way I could understand even at a young age. He gave me his presence and his time. He remained, he continues to be present, and he did not depart. While I don't think either of us imagined that life would take us in this direction, my father did his best to lay down his life for My mother, my sister, and I. I'm reminded of the words "You did not choose me, but I chose you."

Now just to be clear, I'm not trying to say my Dad was just like Jesus. He was great, to sure, but he wasn't perfect. He did do his best to set me up for my adult life, and give me guidance through his advice and his actions. My dad showed me that love is a choice. And whether or not I was ready, regardless if I was worthy to receive it, my Dad chose to love me, and to be present in my life. As an adult, I know that my life wouldn't be the same without him, and I probably wouldn't be standing here today without his influence in my life. In a way, I abide in my Dad's love. The moral choices I make and the way I express love to others comes from the love my Dad showed me. As a youth minister I know that sometimes in the great puzzle of life, the best thing we can do for our neighbor is to just be a loving presence. Love can't really be

measured in dollars and cents, or in the right words at the right time, but perhaps it can be measured in hours, days, and years shared together. I hope and pray that the fruit of that love my Dad shared with me is evident in the life I share with others.

And that's all well and good. I don't think you need any kind of inspiring life experience to love one another as Jesus commands. When looking at the text, it might seem rather simple. Just love one another.

In reality I think everyone knows how difficult love can be when faced with the hardships of reality. Regardless of how much I respect my step-father now, our relationship is far from perfect. My Dad, like most Dads, saw my flaws and shortcomings quite clearly. He would tell me all the time, "Jacob, you are your own worst enemy." While I hated hearing that, to this day I find wisdom in those words.

There were many times in my child hood that I was far from ready or willing to receive love from my step-father. I can remember those angst-filled teenage years when it was easier to feel angry than to confront the pain and confusion I was feeling. There were some days that I really let my Dad have it. Sometimes it was easier to say hurtful things like "You're not my real dad" rather than admit "You're all I've got." It was easier to just express rage at the closest available target rather than to take a look at the real problem.

Whether it's an old friend or a complete stranger, sometimes the circumstances of life can make love seem impossible. People feel pain and hurt others for reasons we don't understand or aren't even aware of. Sometimes other people's circumstances are so complex and difficult that we don't even want to put in the effort of trying to understand. Sometimes it's so much easier just to write people off as unlovable. Our own pain and anguish can stifle our ability to love each other. Perhaps, we really are our own worst enemy.

In spite of that difficulty, Jesus offers us Good News. Jesus says “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” Regardless of our sin, our pain, and our inability to love at times, God has grace for us. My Dad once told me, “if anyone can put up with your anger, it’s God.” God chooses us, chooses to lay down his life to love us, and chooses adopts us into his family, calling us his friends.

And in return Jesus asks us to obey a simple command. Simple but challenging. Love one another. Abide within my love. If we can hold fast to God’s grace, and foster love in our lives, God will help us bear fruit, and grow that love in others. God gives us a great example to follow in Christ, and the promise that love counts, love matters, love makes a real difference. Love will bear a fruit that lasts, that contributes to a better world, to a kingdom of God here on earth.

May it be so. Amen.