



Immanuel Lutheran Church

Transcript from the May 9, 2021 sermon delivered by Rev. Tab Ottmers

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

It is still the Easter season. God's grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text for this Sixth Sunday of Easter is the Gospel reading that was just read, and most especially the last part, beginning in verse 16, "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. These things I command you, so that you will love one another."

These things I command you so that you will love one another. Jesus commands us to repent, to believe in him. And from this faith flows love. God gives that which he demands. First, he gives us love. So that that love then may flow to others. Very much like how God demanded sacrifices in the Old Testament, God first gives all the animals and all things. First, he gives that which he demands. And to be honest, that's why we love him, because God gives that which he demands. So, if we are to love one another, we must first believe that for the sake of Jesus, were loved by God, and that we are saved by faith.

Now perhaps, if we were to ask Jesus to edit some of the Bible, this verse might be at the top of the list. Now sure, the whole thing about cutting off your hand if it causes you to sin, or poking out your eye if it causes you to sin, those two might rank pretty high on the list. But today, I think, we just might have well wished I stopped reading at verse 16, in our gospel. "So that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." Well, that's wonderful! That's a great way to end the Gospel reading. We can see what we are told to ask for. We are told to ask for faith so that love would flow. That would be a much better way to end the Gospel reading today, "ask my father and whatever you ask, he'll give it to you." But no, Jesus goes on to say, "these things I command you, so that you will love one another."

Oh, but Jesus, you've never been to a church council meeting. Jesus, you've never had to deal with your own children. Jesus, you've never had to sit across the table from them. You've never had to clean up a mess. You haven't had to deal with all these people's embarrassing habits. Jesus, my wife always argues. My husband, he is unbearable. Jesus, you don't know what it's like.



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Jesus doesn't say that we should like one another. Jesus doesn't say, "these things I command you so that you may tolerate." Jesus doesn't say, "go along to get along." Jesus says, "love one another." That's quite a bit different from like.

"Like" and "love." Ask any college-age sweetheart whose boyfriend or girlfriend just broke up with them by saying, "I like you. But I don't love you." They will tell you "like" is worlds apart from "love." Jesus said these things I command you so that you love one another.

Jesus is of course speaking to the disciples, but he's also speaking to you and me. The world can tolerate liking one another. Although our political discourse is making this more difficult every day. But Jesus' teaching is far and away much greater than anything the world can promise you. The world can teach us to like. It can even call that love. But the world knows nothing of the love of God. This is what is different in this room. This is what is different throughout the whole Christian Church. We don't like one another. We love.

Or maybe, if we wanted to change this verse, maybe we could change another part of it. Like the world we could change the definition of the word love. Or maybe we change it from command to suggestion. These things I suggest to you that you love one another. Like a waiter who suggests the recommended meal of the day, the special, the blue plate platter. But no, Jesus' word doesn't change on a daily basis. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

Notice how Jesus starts off in verse nine. The love that Jesus is speaking about is the love that the Father has for him. And in this love, there is no compromise. In this love there is no one-upmanship. There is no complaint. In this love, there is no jealousy. In this love, there is no pride. In this love, there is no looking and pointing out the other's weaknesses. There's no taking advantage of the other.

So, what does that look like for us?

If you notice, we don't have an Old Testament reading for the season of Easter. The reason for this is that the church uses the Easter season to reflect on the events immediately after the resurrection of Jesus. To focus on the life of the church and what it means to be in life together. What does the life of the church look like since Jesus has risen from the dead?

These things I command you that you love one another.



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Up until this point, the sermon that Jesus has given is pretty easy to hear. The love of the Father, ask whatever you want, you didn't choose me but I chose you. This is all well and good. But... love one another?

Last week, Jesus told us to abide in him. That he is the vine, we are the branches. We are to receive everything from him. And he gives all that we need. Abide in him. Look to him for all that you need, including love. Keep his commandments, he says. Well, what does he command? Well, he says, believe in me. First, repent of your sins. Trust in me. Forsake yourself. I am the vine. I will give you forgiveness. I will give you righteousness, just as the Father has given me everything that I need. And I can live by faith, so too will I give to you. So, abide in me.

And then what does Jesus say in our reading? He continues on. He says, “these things I have spoken to you because I want you to be miserable?” No. He says, “these things I've spoken to you so that your joy may be full.”

Why are we full of joy? Well, we're full of joy because by faith we receive all the love and joy from Jesus. Forgiveness is complete and fulfilled, overflowing so much so we can give it out even to people who don't appreciate it. We know that in Jesus, we can love one another.

We are to love others as he loved us. And he says abide in that love. When Jesus shed his blood on the cross, he was the headwaters. He was the fount of the love of God for the whole world. Jesus picked up his cross and the love of God was shown. Every single one of your sins forgiven. Jesus became the very source of love by giving up and dying on the cross.

Forgiveness for all of your embarrassing habits. Forgiveness for all your sins, even the sins only your mom knows about. God knows all your sins and imperfections more than you, more than anyone. And he doesn't cast you away. He does not excuse your sins and say, “oh, well, they don't know any better.” He doesn't huff and puff and say, “well, I'll just put up with them I guess.” Jesus doesn't see our sins and say, “oh they're someone only a mother could love.”

No, Jesus' love is even greater than a mother for her children. Jesus doesn't see you in his church and then just go the other way. He doesn't put on a nice face while inwardly despising you. That's what Judas does. No, Jesus wants to forgive you, not make excuses. He wants you to know how much you and he have been reconciled together.



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Today we should rightly celebrate and honor motherhood. Our world is evil, and it is dead set on despising the gifts of God including motherhood. We should encourage and teach the love of motherhood as much as being athletes or engineers or promoting STEM programs. Children are the only gift of God that will be with us and eternal life.

It's not that the two are mutually exclusive. But when have you heard a commercial extolling the beauty and the joy of being a mother? Children will be the only gift that we receive in this life that will be with us in the resurrection, Lord willing. It will even outlast marriage. We should fight against the despising of mothers and family, and that begins in the house.

Even if your mother was unkind or not very motherly, forgive her. And children should ask the forgiveness of their mother first. God chose her for you and you for her. What greater picture of the love of God than a mother who gives her own body for her children?

So also, from the very body of God, Christ Jesus, we are birthed and sustained. Nurtured and fed in his house. Jesus is the vine. Forgiveness and love flow from him. Life itself flows from Christ. Abide in the cross, and you know you are forgiven. Don't look to your own strength but abide in His Word.

“These things I command you.” What a joyous command! What a wonderful thing to hear! That Jesus points us to faith in the promise of the forgiveness of sins, so that our joy may be founded there. So that we may love one another. So that there is maybe someone you have difficulty liking. Liking someone requires you to find something in them that you benefit from that brings you happiness. And sometimes that's very hard. But loving someone... Loving someone requires you to first look at God.

It may seem impossible to love your enemies, but with God, all things are possible. Loving someone requires you to look to Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit gives you love. That's what Jesus commands us to do. Not so that we are miserable under his commandments. Jesus says his commandments are not hard, nor are they burdensome. They aren't there to hurt us. But to show us true joy. Yes, Jesus says that when we abide in Him, we will love one another. God gives that which he demands. But more than that, God demands perfect righteousness. And so, he gives Jesus. And in Jesus you find perfect love and perfect forgiveness.

Is the church perfect? Are we perfect? Our family's perfect? No, no, we're not. But after Easter, we hear how the church's life is to be centered around the forgiveness of sins. This is what Jesus died for and why he was raised from the dead. For us to come together around forgiveness, to love one another. Not to excuse sins. Not to hold one another sins against us. Not to just get along. Not to tolerate one another.



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But in the cross together receiving the same forgiveness, love. Yes, we've chosen to wander. We've chosen to ignore one another. We've chosen to gossip. We've chosen to build ourselves up instead of repenting. We've chosen to neglect the bride of Christ.

Christ says I've chosen you. I've chosen to abide in you. I've chosen to call you friend and to lay down my life for you, even before you understood what was happening to you, I chose you in the waters of baptism. When you chose to sin and to be lost and to run away from my commandments, I sought you out. I came to you, even now this week. As you have worried. As you have forgotten the promises of God. As you've forgotten all that Christ has said.

He doesn't ask the strong and the perfect to come back to him. But he bids the weak and the lost to come to his altar, to dine with him. To abide in him as his very body and blood abides in you. To sit with those we love. And when you find it hard to love, or even to like, don't run away from Jesus, but repent, run to him.

Because it's impossible to love without faith in Christ. He who knows not God knows not love. It's impossible to love when we think we'll eventually be strong enough to like someone. It's impossible to love when we think someone else will eventually be good enough for us to love them.

However, with our eyes fixed on Jesus, our faith focused on Christ, God gives that which he demands. The unlikable become loved, the imperfect perfected in Christ by the love of the Father.

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