

SACRIFICIAL, UNCONDITIONAL, ALL-ENCOMPASING GODLY LOVE

He is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this sixth Sunday in the season of the Resurrection of our Lord, as Jesus says:

You did not choose Me, but I chose all of you; and I have appointed all of you that you go and bear fruit, and your fruit remains, that whatever all of you may request the Father in My Name He might give to all of you.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This morning's readings are not connected by theme. They are from a series that is designed to get more biblical texts in front of the Church over each three year period than others might provide. That means that the preacher, rather than emphasizing textual connections, is freed to simply work with one text, and expound it for the edification and encouragement of the hearers. To that end, this day we are focusing upon the Words of Jesus in the Gospel reading.

As context for biblical readings is critical to right hearing and understanding the words of our Lord, the setting of this week's text is important. Jesus' words regarding two named loves in the Gospel- unconditional and brotherly - follow His teaching about the Vine and branches. It occurs after Judas has left the number of closest disciples in order to betray our Lord. It is with that in mind that Jesus says:

Just as the Father unconditionally loved Me, also I all of you unconditionally loved; remain in My unconditional love.²

¹ John 15:16.

² John 15:9.

Those words of sacrificial, unconditional, all-encompassing godly love flow through to those who have just been called by God to remain attached to Him that He might bear fruit through them. (That was last Sunday's scheduled reading for congregations that follow this series of readings).

Following today's section regarding God's unconditional love and His followers' response to Him by continuing in unconditional love for one another comes Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit. Accompanying that promise of the Spirit of God, Jesus also declares the reality that worldly and spiritual persecution will happen to those who remain attached to Him through His unconditional sacrificial love.

To summarize this week's Gospel context: before these words Jesus calls His disciples to remain attached to Him and promises to bear fruit through them -

*Just as the Father unconditionally loved Me, also I all of you unconditionally loved; remain in My unconditional love.*³

And, after these words, you have Jesus' Promise of the Holy Spirit and persecution to those who remain attached to Him -

*These things I command to all of you, that all of you love one another.*⁴

So, how have you been doing lately at remaining in Christ, and displaying that attachment by following His command to sacrificially, unconditionally, and godly love your brothers and sisters in Christ? By that I mean also your nearest relatives in the

³ John 15:9.

⁴ John 15:17.

Lord – your husband or wife, children, familial brothers and sisters, the members of this congregation, the members of sister confessing congregations.

Jesus leaves no wriggle room with regard to His command to sacrificially love your Christian brothers and sisters, no matter how close or far the human blood-relation ties might be. If you were honest with yourself at that question, you would have to admit, at best, that you have not been perfectly keeping the Word of the Lord. That means you need to turn from your sins of not perfectly, unconditionally, sacrificially, godly loving your fellow Christians. It means that you confess your sins before God, and receive His forgiveness and love anew this day. To this end, to effect this turning and absolution in you, God has given you His Word:

Greater unconditional love no one has than this; that someone his life might place concerning his beloved friends.⁵

That means that you are to find the means to repent and the means of God's forgiveness in the sacrificially placing – the laying down – of the soul and life of the One who has named you His beloved friends. That means you are being called to look to Jesus. He has named you His beloved – when He called you by Name into His Father's family with the Water and Word of Holy Baptism. He laid down His life for you after having taken your sins upon Himself. He carried your times of lovelessness into the grave. And, that His unconditional love might abound anew each day in your life, He rose from the grave that you might know that you have been declared right in all things forever with the Father in heaven!

Only with the unconditional, sacrificial love, godly love of Christ dwelling in you through daily repentance and forgiveness may you, or any Christian, follow the greatest commandments of God. And those are?

1. *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*
2. *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*⁶

With your God-given ability to love Him and your neighbor in mind, today's Gospel reading is calling you to apply that love, the second greatest commandment as Jesus summarized it, to your fellow Christian brothers and sisters. While other texts speak of applying these words of our Lord to all humans, this week's text declares that we apply them to Christians.

Someone might maintain that this should be easier to do than for those who are not part of the Faith. However, human nature, that which still dwells in believers, the Old Adam, the sinful Man, can make unconditionally sacrificially loving one's Christian neighbor more difficult than doing so for the unregenerate. Biblically based Reason indicates that Christians should assume that unbelievers will do evil, and cannot do any good in God's sight. So, for the Christian, forgiving one who cannot but sin, actually may come easier than forgiving one who not only knows what sin is, but then does it!

What this means is that we weigh our Christian brothers and sisters on scales greater than those we apply to non-believers! Yet, this is not what Christ did. He weighed all people, disciples and non-disciples alike, and found all wanting and

⁵ *John 15:13.*

deserving of nothing but death and everlasting condemnation. To effect His love, His Father's love, Jesus bore the full load of that condemnation so that those whom He chose would be freed from its burden. That means that you, dear Christians, are actually free to forgive your Christian brothers and sisters, even your immediate human family members, just as you forgive those who do not know Christ Jesus!

With His sacrifice for sin, for your sins, and for the sins of your erring Christian brother or sister in mind, hear again the Word of the Lord:

You did not choose Me, but I chose all of you; and I have appointed all of you that you go and bear fruit, and your fruit remains, that whatever all of you may request the Father in My Name He might give to all of you.⁷

That text is this Sunday's emphasis because it explains Who gives one the right to become a child of God, and thereby able to apply His forgiveness to other humans. It helps us to remember that we Christians have been chosen to be Jesus' followers by none other than Jesus Himself. (This is one of many texts that blows away any "I decided to follow Jesus" theology)! Jesus clearly says, first to His remaining disciples, when all others had fallen away, and His betrayer had gone forth to hand Him over to death, *You did not choose Me, but I chose all of you....*

It is fitting that this reminder comes before the Ascension and Pentecost feasts. It prepares the hearer, you, to recall, in God's electing you in Christ to be one of His beloved friends, that this was not your work, but His. Most of you have learned that truth with words like these:

⁶ Matthew 22:37b and 39b; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18b. New King James Version.

*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened my with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*⁸

That reinforces in your hearing that God is the One Who, through His Word, works faith and life, and the fruits of the faith in you. In other words, you may freely say, “Jesus is beloved friend to me,” not, “I am beloved friend to Jesus.” Jesus will not be your friend if He does what you say. You are Jesus’ friend, however, as you do what He says. Jesus’ friends are the objects of His sacrificial, unconditional love. That means that God is the One Who, in Christ, elected you be His child. Out of love He has placed you in this earthly family of believers we call Christ Lutheran Mission Church, Marana. Many of you have learned that to be how God has chosen to work with words like these:

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

*In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.*⁹

Because God in Christ has forgiven you all your sins, and the sins of all the believers about you, you are free to follow the next words of our Lord from our day’s theme text:

*I have appointed all of you that you go and bear fruit, and your fruit remains, that whatever all of you may request the Father in My Name He might give to all of you.*¹⁰

Those words make even more sense to we who have heard that they follow Jesus’ teaching about the Vine and the branches. There He promised that those whom

⁷ John 15:16.

⁸ Dr. Luther’s Small Catechism, “The Creed: Third Article,” St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005. 17.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John 15:16b,c.

He prunes (cuts off dry, dead and useless parts) – as you have learned: through daily contrition and repentance – will bear much fruit. This fruit He defines in today's text is none other than requesting that the Father's will be done among us. Of that you can be certain, because Jesus says:

No longer do I call all of you "slaves," because the slave remains not knowing what his Lord does; but, all of you I call "beloved," because all the things which I heard from My Father I make known to you.¹¹

The significance there is that those who are not mere slaves, bound to the Master's will by force of Law, but beloved friends of Jesus are those who know they are so because they know what their Lord does, and why He does it. Here we could be directed to the third petition of the Lord's Prayer and its meaning. Suffice it to say that Jesus is comforting those who have not continued to forsake Him. He does this so that they know His Father's purpose, and act on that will, not by force, but on account of sacrificial, unconditional love.

It is from the unconditional love of believer for believer that God has willed to bring forth fruit. What fruit is this? In this text it is the fruit of a united witness of care, concern, and sacrifice for our fellow Christians. This then leads to more fruit – the evidence that is seen as a witness to those who are outside our fellowship in Christ. It is the following of the aforementioned Second Greatest Commandment, as Jesus says:

This remains My commandment: that all of you unconditionally love one another just as I have unconditionally loved all of you.¹²

¹¹ John 15:15.

¹² John 15:12.

Return to the Lord your God. You have been chosen by God to live in His unconditional, sacrificial godly love. You may share that love first with your fellow Christians. You are free to forgive them, as you forgive those who know no better. Jesus' promise is for you:

These things I have spoken to all of you that My joy (may remain) in all of you, also (that) your joy might be fulfilled.¹³

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Resurrection VI (*LSB* One-year series)

Acts 10:34-48; I John 5:1-9; John 15:9-17

May 17, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

¹³ *John* 15:11.

SECOND TRANSLATION:

Just as He unconditionally loved Me, the Father, also I all of you unconditionally loved; you all remain in the unconditional love, the one of Me.¹⁴

If the commandments of Me all of you keep, you all remain in the unconditional love of Me, just as I the commandments of the Father of Me I keep, and I remain of Him in the unconditional love.¹⁵

These things I have spoken to all of you that the joy, the My, in all of you, the one also the joy of all of you might be fulfilled.¹⁶

This remains the commandment, the one My, that all of you unconditionally love one another just as I have unconditionally loved all of you.¹⁷

Greater than this unconditional love no one has, that someone the soul of him might place concerning the beloved of him.¹⁸

All of you beloved of Me remain if all of you do which things I command to all of you.¹⁹

No longer I say all of you all (are) slaves, because the slave not knowing what he does, the Lord of him. But you all I say, "beloved," because all the things which I heard with the Father of Me I make known to all of you.²⁰

Not all of you Me chose out, but I chose out all of you and I have placed all of you that you all go and fruit you all bear, and the fruit of you all remains, that the one something which all of you may request the Father in the Name of Me He might give to all of you.²¹

These things I command to all of you, that all of you love one another.²²

Final Draft:

If My commandments of all of you keep, you remain in My unconditional love, just as I the Father's commandments keep, and I remain in His unconditional love.²³

These things I have spoken to all of you that My joy (may remain) in all of you, also (that) your joy might be fulfilled.²⁴

¹⁴ John 15:9.

¹⁵ John 15:10.

¹⁶ John 15:11.

¹⁷ John 15:12.

¹⁸ John 15:13.

¹⁹ John 15:14.

²⁰ John 15:15.

²¹ John 15:16.

²² John 15:17.

²³ John 15:10.

²⁴ John 15:11.

This remains My commandment: that all of you unconditionally love one another just as I have unconditionally loved all of you.²⁵

Greater unconditional love no one has than this; that someone his life might place concerning his beloved friends.²⁶

All of you remain My beloved friends if all of you do whichever things I command you.²⁷

No longer do I call all of you "slaves," because the slave remains not knowing what his Lord does; but, all of you I call "beloved," because all the things which I heard from My Father I make known to you.²⁸

You did not choose Me, but I chose all of you; and I have appointed all of you that you go and bear fruit, and your fruit remains, that whatever all of you may request the Father in My Name He might give to all of you.²⁹

These things I command to all of you, that all of you love one another.³⁰

²⁵ *John 15:12.*

²⁶ *John 15:13.*

²⁷ *John 15:14.*

²⁸ *John 15:15.*

²⁹ *John 15:16.*

³⁰ *John 15:17.*