

May 9, 2021 – Sixth Sunday of Easter  
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John 15:9-17, 1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17 “<sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant 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. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

Grace, peace and mercy be to you from God our Father, and our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Love, love, love, love, love. On this day in which the world celebrates the love of Mothers and other women in our lives, this Gospel text all about love seems very appropriate. We hear that Jesus has shared the love of God the Father with us, and that we in turn should share that love with others. That seems pretty simple, right? After all, love is all around us. We hear the word “love” constantly in our culture. We may say we love pizza. We love the music of our favorite artist. We talk about how we love our iPhone or smartwatch. Love is sometimes reduced down to the physical intimacy between two people. We love this or that. Love, love, love – it’s all about love these days. But there is a deeper dimension to love that we can know and live in our lives. It can be framed as a question: Let us not ask how often we say the word love, but rather let us ask ourselves, are we known by love in the things that we do?

In our biblical text, Jesus speaks simply but profoundly about a life saturated in love and out of which love freely flows. It is vital that we breathe in deeply the

truth of Jesus' teaching about love, as it directs our path in life. Jesus' words describe humanity as God has created us to be: agents and vessels of God's love for others. We are loved by God – that is demonstrated by Jesus' words in this text, as well as many other passages of Scripture that recount the things that Jesus did to demonstrate this love. The most well-known being John 3:16, "For God so LOVED the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." We are loved by God, but what does this mean for our lives? What does it mean to love God back? And what does it mean to share that love with others?

When I was younger, I never questioned God's love for me. Perhaps it is because I grew up attending church and Sunday School, and the idea of God's love was deeply imprinted into my brain as I sang, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so..." God's love was a universal truth, like gravity, that I never questioned or doubted. I guess that's why they call that a childlike faith.

As I grew older, I began to understand that relationships were really a two-way street. Whether it was my parents, friends, or siblings, our relationships were about give and take, and it was the same with God. I learned that I could reciprocate God's love for me, by finding ways to express my love for God and by sharing that love with others. We can show our love to God in the same way we express our love for others. People give and receive love in different ways. Some people give gifts, some people spend quality time together, some people use their words, and some show their love by serving others.

When we think about loving God, one way we can show our love is found in one of the other texts appointed for today, 1 John 5:3, "For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments." Jesus says that if we keep his commandments, we will abide in his love, and our joy may be complete. When we abide in God's love and keep God's commandments, we continue to deepen our relationship and

experience God's joy. Sometimes we can think of commandments as a set of rules or laws that we must follow, but when I used to teach the Ten Commandments to Confirmation students, I took a different approach. I framed the Ten Commandments as gifts that God has given to us because of being in relationship with God and other people in our lives. They help to guide and enhance our lives and the ways that we interact with people – such as not taking things that don't belong to us, refraining from lying and speaking ill of someone else, and honoring all of the relationships that have been entrusted to us – including our parents, neighbors and above all, God. When we allow God's commandments to direct our words and actions, it helps us to abide in God's love and reciprocate that love. There are many other ways that we can show our love for God: singing songs of praise, reading God's Word, spending time in prayer, enjoying the beauty of creation, etc., but Jesus says that following his teachings is the primary way we can show love.

Taking this a step further, when Jesus taught about what it means to be a disciple and showing our love for God, it is connected in how we also love others, so they too might experience God's love in their lives. Going back to our gospel lesson today, Jesus says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." From the ultimate model and example of God's love, given to us in the sacrifice of God's only Son, Jesus – we can respond to that gift of love in our lives by showing that same sacrificial love to others. When we hear this call to lay down our life for another – I know what many of us may be thinking. "Is Jesus really calling me to die for someone else?" For most of us, we will probably never literally sacrifice our own life for the sake of others – although there certainly are plenty of examples of people who have done that throughout history.

What I think this text is actually speaking to us today is the ways that we are called to proclaim and demonstrate God's love that has been poured into us in ways that put the needs of others above our own. Jesus certainly taught about this kind of servant-leader, sacrificial kind of living when he said that the first shall be last or through the words of the Beatitudes when he lifted up the poor in spirit, the meek, the peacemakers and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness as the model for what a follower of Jesus would be. The kind of love that God has shown us is one that thinks of others before thinking of oneself. Parents, especially mothers, certainly know a thing or two about that as we frequently sacrifice our own wants and needs for the sake of our children and family – living out God's love in those everyday interactions. As Jesus' disciples we are all called to reflect the love of God to those around us. These days we may be laying down our life for others by continuing to wear masks and keep a good distance from others as a way to keep them safe and healthy. Laying down our life for our neighbor may take the form of marching in a protest and speaking out against the violence and injustice in our society. To follow God's command of loving one another as God has loved us means that we look for the least and lost who are on the margins of our communities and advocating for their needs through changes to the immigration or justice system. This text reminds us that Jesus has chosen us, to go and bear fruit. This passage is a continuation of the vine and branches illustration from last week's gospel text. When we remain in God's love, we are able to bear fruity love to those around us as we put others ahead of ourselves.

I started out today by saying it was all about love. That is true and will never change, when we realize that the love I'm talking about is God's love. It is all about love, because it was love that motivated God to send Jesus to this world. It was love that nailed Jesus to the cross as he died for you and me. It was love that rolled away the stone and brought Jesus back from the dead. It is love that sought

you out and brought you into a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit working in you. It is love that causes us to love – God, ourselves, and those around us. It is love that motivates us to bear fruit and tell others about this love of God for them and actually show that love through our actions. God loves you. We love God. We are called to share that love in our lives so that it may deepen and grow. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### Prayers of the People

Remembering the life of Nicolaus Zinzendorf, we pray on this sixth Sunday of Easter for the Moravian Church, for the baptized around the world, and for all people according to their needs, responding to each petition with the words “fill us with your love.”

*A brief silence.*

O triune God, we praise you for your wondrous love, for the witness of Moravian Christians, and for the steadfastness of believers throughout this pandemic. Whenever churches face hardship or challenge, strengthen us in affection within and between denominations.

Hear us, loving God: **fill us with your love.**

We praise you for the beauty of spring, and we stand in awe of even the hungry cicadas. Wherever creation is beckoning us to lives of ecological restraint, teach us your care of our earth.

Hear us, creating God: **fill us with your love.**

We praise you for all efforts to achieve peace throughout the world. Wherever violence prevails, wherever brutality silences protest, wherever prejudice reigns, wherever the rich oppress the poor, lead us and all nations into the ways of justice.

Hear us, righteous God: **fill us with your love.**

We praise you for the gradual lessening of the pandemic and for your gift of vaccines. Wherever the virus still rages (especially India, Turkey, and South America), wherever medical resources are depleted, wherever medical advice is rejected, extend the power of your healing hand. Be present with all who today will die, and visit all who are sick or suffering, especially those we lift to you now. . . .

Hear us, healing God: **fill us with your love.**

We praise you for the loving support of mothers to their children. Bless mothers, stepmothers, foster mothers, godmothers, and all people who give mothering care. Protect mothers in societies where women have few rights. Comfort those who grieve because they cannot mother a child or for those who have lost their mothers. Wherever children are deprived of mothering, provide responsible and affectionate care.

Hear us, mothering God: **fill us with your love.**

We praise you for calling yourself our friend. Receive now the petitions of our own hearts.

Hear us, dearest God: **fill us with your love.**

We praise you for the witness of all who have died in the faith, especially for Nicolaus Zinzendorf, the apostle Matthias, and those we name in our hearts. Keep us united with all your children until we join them in your presence forever.

Hear us, everlasting God: **fill us with your love.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.  
**Amen.**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.**

May our glorious God grant us a spirit of wisdom  
to know and to love the risen Lord Jesus.

The God of life,  
Father, + Son and Holy Spirit, bless us now and forever.  
**Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen.  
**Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**