

Payson United Methodist Church
Rev. Michael J. Eaton
Sermon Series “Living the Resurrection”
No Greater Love
John 15:9-17
May 9, 2021

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⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ I 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. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ 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. 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.

Sermon:

Jesus is continuing his talks with his disciples. Chapters 14 through 17 are referred to as the Farewell Discourse. Remember, this starts with a meal. Think about times when either you or someone you love was leaving you. There is usually a meal. Words are shared about the relationship that was experienced. Words are shared about the future. The idea of the gathering is to send your loved one off in a meaningful way.

This is what the disciples are experiencing from Jesus. In Chapters 13 and 14 there is a back-and-forth discussion about Jesus’ departure. Questions are raised concerning a statement about betrayal. Jesus speaks of going away but coming back in Chapter 14. Additionally, while Jesus is away, there is talk of a spirit that will come to remind the disciples of Jesus.

Last week we heard Jesus asking his disciples to abide in him. He uses the image of a vine with branches to share the connection that Jesus desires to continue in his absence.

In these Bible verses today, Jesus speaks of abiding in his love. If you were counting the number of times the word “love” was used in today’s reading you would find the total to be 7. That’s a lot of love expression in 6 verses.

Jesus speaks of keeping his commandments. The disciples may have heard the word “Torah” in Jesus’ words. They were faithful Jews who did their best to follow the Law of Moses. It was sometimes hard to keep all of the commandments with the Law of Moses. Jesus was able to keep them. The disciples are wondering if Jesus’ love for them depends on them keeping the commandments. But Jesus puts that idea to rest. If the disciples love Jesus, all the commandments boil down to one all-encompassing commandment, “Love one another.” However, this kind of love is not some kind a fuzzy, undefined state. Jesus wants them to love one another as He has loved them.

Jesus has loved those He picked for discipleship from the very beginning. They didn’t do anything to earn his love. Jesus saw some of God’s children doing their daily activities and called them to ministry. I have loved my children since they were in their mother’s womb. The same happened for my grandchild. I love them because they are gifts from God. I believe Jesus viewed his disciples as gifts from God.

Rob and Kristen Bell have written a helpful book on love-relationships. You might find something here useful for Mother's Day. The book is called [The Zimzum of Love](#).

The title may sound unfamiliar -- and that's no surprise. Zimzum is a term derived from Jewish mysticism. It describes the space between two people, the emptiness into which each one enters, tentatively, then backs off, in the ebb and flow of giving and receiving love. It's a light touch, that zimzum -- not unlike the light touch on a balloon string.

Rob and Kristen describe three stages of drawing closer to the one we love -- of becoming more committed. The three stages are: spark, substance and sacrifice.

Spark is what first appears in those beautiful, early days of a romantic relationship: the feeling of joy, even ecstasy, at simply being in the presence of that special someone. We hardly need to say more about that, because it's all over the entertainment media: the movies, the TV shows, the romantic novels.

The relationship matures, over years. In the zinzum, the ceaseless back-and-forth dance, the two lovers weave a different quality of relationship. The spark is still there, but even more wonderful than that is the growing substance -- a solid relationship that's more like having a best friend, the ease and comfort in one another's presence, the building together of a home, eventually. There's something there, something real, something trustworthy and lasting.

Far rarer -- and far more precious -- is the third stage: sacrifice. It's not something anyone looks for, nor desires. Often, it's associated with significant loss, even pain. Something happens: something bad, something unforeseen. The beloved is at risk. Yet, because of the love, the sacrifice is simply what one has to do; and one offers it to the beloved out of abiding joy, a joy so deep it issues, not in laughter, but in sighs and even tears.

Such is Christian love in all its delight, its complexities, its joy. Or, as the Greeks would say, eros, philia, agape. None of them are heavy-handed. All require that light touch that allows the beloved to soar.

Jesus shares that love is sacrificial. That is what is meant by laying down one's life for another. Love doesn't depend on being loved back.

On June 22, 1996 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Ku Klux Klan held a rally at the City Hall. They had a permit for the event and it was advertised in advance, so not only did the Klan showed up; more than 300 demonstrators appeared to protest the rally. One Klansman was wearing clothes that displayed the Confederate flag and was attacked by a swarm of demonstrators and pushed to the ground.

Appalled, an 18-year-old African-American girl named Keisha Thomas, threw herself over the fallen man, shielding him with her own body from

the kicks and punches. Keisha, when asked why, she, a black teenager, would risk injury to protect a man who was a white supremacist, said, “He’s still somebody’s child. I don’t want people to remember my name, but I’d like them to remember I did the right thing.”

Keisha expressed love to the Klansman. She literally laid her life down for him. Remember that I mentioned some people are unlovable, but we need to love them too. Keisha exemplified that idea.

Jesus’ ultimate act of love for us was to go to the cross. He sacrificed himself to show He would die for those He loved. God turned that act of sacrifice into grace for us all.

Jesus now shares a twist to the teacher/student, master/servant motif. Jesus calls his disciples his friends. This friendship is not grounded in some noble idea. Rather, the friendship is grounded in Jesus’ love for his friends. Friends share hopes and dreams with one another. Jesus has shared with the disciples a lot about God with them. Jesus has not held back from sharing the love that comes from God to Jesus, and Jesus to his friends.

There is the reminder that Jesus chose them instead of the other way around. What I said previously about seeing people as gifts from God holds true here too. Jesus was not interviewing people to see whether they could handle the long days of travel. He didn’t check to see if the disciples could love everyone they encountered. Jesus looked and saw people fishing, people doing taxes, and people that needed hope in their lives. Jesus chose them and let the days of being together play out however it will play out.

Jesus says again to bear fruit — the kind of fruit that lasts. We can also ask God for help in this endeavor.

Jesus commands us to love one another, and shares that sacrificial love is the way to do so. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians in Chapter 2, verses 2 through 4 puts it this way:

Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Jesus says our joy will be complete when we love one another, and Jesus will be filled with joy by us following his command.

“Love Like Jesus,” are the words that I see a lot around here. That tells me that you get what Jesus is trying to get across in these 6 verses. Let’s see what we can do as we act in ways of sacrificial love going above and beyond our own need to the needs of others. This demonstration of love will show the world how love is supposed to work. Those in the world may catch on and be a part of the church that shares this love. Amen.