

13 May 2012
Easter 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Love One Another”
Text: John 15:9-17; 1 John 5:1-8

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Since today is Mother’s Day . . .

A mother said to her son, “Son, please clean your room.” “I love you, Mom!” said the son, who did not clean his room.

A little later the mother said, “Son, please take out the trash.” “I love you, Mom!” said the son, who did not take out the trash.

And then a bit later there was a knock on the door, and the mother said, “Son, could you answer the door please? I’m busy cooking dinner.” “I love you, Mom!” said the son, who . . . well, you know.

There’s a problem in that house, isn’t there?

Now, if you’re wondering if that story is about my son and his mother, well, yes it is! But it’s not just about him - it’s also about me and my mother, and you and your mothers. And, most importantly, it’s about us and our heavenly Father, isn’t it?

In the Holy Gospel today, Jesus said: **“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”**

Love one another. That should be easy! Jesus doesn’t command us to pray five times a day, or fast twice a week, or go on difficult pilgrimages to holy places, or sell all we have and give to the poor, or do all kinds of onerous, burdensome things - He simply said this: *love one another.* That’s it. Just *love one another.* That is, in fact, the summary of all the commandments. They are a description of what love looks like. **Abide in my love,** Jesus said. *Love one another.*

Yet how often are we like that son? How often, instead of love, do anger, discord, bitterness, partiality, jealousy, impatience, suspicion, hostility, greed, laziness, and discontent reign in our lives instead? We criticize instead of care. We gripe and grumble instead of giving of ourselves. We get impatient instead of understanding. We’d rather let somebody else help and mind our own business. We resent other’s good fortune instead of rejoicing with them. We know we shouldn’t be that way,

yet how often do these things come welling up from within our hearts? The sin we didn't even know was there. The sin we inherited from Adam infecting us and poisoning our lives and our love.

And speaking of Adam, he's another one God gave but a *single* command to, remember? Just: don't eat from this one tree. Just this one! You can eat from all the others: apples, oranges, pears, pomagranites, figs, cherries, you name it - they're all yours to eat and enjoy. Just not this one, please. Reserve this one for me.

Now, the scriptures don't say what kind of fruit was on that tree. Was it a different fruit than all the others? Unique and special and one-of-a-kind, that God was holding back from Adam? I don't think so. I think it was just one of many, let's say, fig trees. So by not eating it, Adam isn't missing out on anything. He's not deprived of anything. He's simply loving God by keeping, by honoring, this one request.

But he couldn't do it. Eve was deceived; Adam did it willfully. Because he couldn't have it, it was the tree he desired most of all. And the more time goes on, the harder it gets. For that's the way of it with sin. We want what we can't, or shouldn't, have, or what has not been given to us. And taking it, going after it, or desiring it hurts our love for one another. Because we're thinking of me, not them. Helping me, not them. Loving me, not them. And then Jesus' command, His request: **Love one another**, which sounds so simple, becomes: what about me? And then it's all about me, which is tyranny of the worst kind. It's what Luther wrote of in the hymn we sang today (LSB #556, v. 2): *Fast bound in satan's chains I lay*. When it's all about me, what's all about me, are chains. The chains of sin and death.

But Jesus said: ***These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*** Jesus is not imposing on us. He wants us to have joy. But when we love only ourselves there is not this joy, not a joy that lasts anyway. But one that caves to the insatiable desire for more. For that one tree of which God said: *please, no.*

So what's a God to do? Give us more rules, more laws, more commandments? That's what some think, but that's doesn't work. For how you doing with that one: *Love one another*? If we can't even keep one, how we gonna keep more? No, more rules, more laws, more commandments is the way of servants and slaves. But do you remember what Jesus said today instead? ***No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.***

Friends, not slaves. Friends, not servants. Friends, to whom Jesus has revealed a better way, telling us not more that we have to do, but what He has come to do. That that one tree that Adam and all of us cannot resist, is now a one tree that Jesus

cannot resist. But for Jesus it is not in sin, but in love. For that one tree that He cannot resist is the tree of the cross. For **greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**

Jesus is that someone, who has come to lay down His life for you. For what comes welling up from within His heart is not sin, but love. And so He comes to not only show us, but give us, the love we need. Calling us friends - not because we deserve it, 'cuz we most certainly don't! And calling us friends not because He's *describing* us, but because that's what He's **naming** us; that's what He's **making** us, that's what He's **doing** in us. For what God calls something, that's what it is. God's Word does what it says. **We did not choose Him, He chose us.** Or in other words, we're not His friends because of what we do - we're His friends because of what He did. Because of His tree. Because of the cross.

That just as one tree made us all sinners, so one tree would make us all righteous again. As one tree made us slaves to sin, so one tree would set us free. As one tree brought death into the world, so one tree would bring life to the world. And when Jesus laid down His life for you on the cross - for sinful you, rebellious you, disobedient you, the "what about me?" you - it was so that "you" might die, and a new you arise with Him to life again. A life of forgiveness, a life of freedom, a life of love.

And so Jesus baptized you. And when He did, it was there, in that water, that that old you, that old Adam in you, died, and a friend of God, a *new* Adam, arose. There in that water His tree became your tree - a tree that brings life, not death. For there in that water He gave you His forgiveness and love, that you might live a new life. A slave to sin no longer, but a friend; set free to love.

So you don't love one another in order to be God's friend. God did not tell Adam not to eat from that one tree to become holy - Adam already was. He was created sinless. And we don't love one another to earn something from God and become holy - you already are. Created anew in Holy Baptism. Made a friend of God. Your sins forgiven. No, it is so that you can have the joy that God has for you. The joy of loving and giving.

Friends of God! And as if that weren't enough, did you catch what else Jesus said? **As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.** Don't pass that sentence by! The Father's love for the Son is Jesus' love for you. Anyway you look at it, that's amazing. A completely, 100%, free and undeserved love. From the King of creation and the God of the universe.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. Again, that should be easy! To abide in this completely, 100%, free and undeserved love. . . .

But it's not, is it? Starting out is easy, but abiding, or remaining, not so much. Because there are so many temptations, so many forbidden trees, so much false and deceiving information, so many challenges. And just as with Eve, the devil doesn't pluck the fruit and place it in your hand, *he makes you want it*. He lures and entices you, he makes it look good and makes you all kind of promises if you will just . . . love his word, and love yourself, and love that fruit . . .

But Jesus' love, the Father's love, is different. He actually gives you what He promises. He doesn't tempt you to make you less, but loves you to make you more. To give you what is good, both for your life now and for your life forever. And so Jesus gives you a different fruit - fruit *given*, not taken; the fruit from His tree, His cross: the fruit of His own Body and Blood. Eat this, He says, for life. Eat this for the forgiveness of your sins. Eat this, that I abide in you and you in me, and that my love abide in you. Eat this often - it is the food that you need.

And so once again, Jesus has given us what we need, that we may be who we were created to be. ***The Spirit and the water and the blood*** - His Spirit, His water, and His blood - all testify to that. To His love and forgiveness and life. Given to you, His friends. Given to you, His children.

So there was a Father who said to His children, ***love one another***. But the children didn't yell back, "I love you, Dad!" They just loved one another. For they loved their Father, and they loved Him by loving one another. And it was good. Very good. Again.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.