

**“No Greater Love”**  
*Living the Resurrection – part #5*

*John 15:9-17*

[1] *Welcome, prayer*

[2] On our journey through the Easter season we have been asking ourselves, “What does it mean to live the Resurrection?” Each of us must decide how and if the story of Easter changes us. From disbelief to complete transformation, the example of the early disciples shows of how to live for Jesus and listen to the Holy Spirit.

[3] Today is Mother’s Day. This day brings a mixed bag of emotions. The Bible tells us to honor our mothers, and yet some people find that difficult to do. For women who have wrestled with infertility, miscarriage, and even just rebellious children, Mother’s Day brings some heaviness and envy. For others, maybe your relationship with your mom is strained or non-existent. Maybe your mother has passed away. I acknowledge all of those pains, yet I bring to mind this hope: God is faithful to us. (Lamentations 3:21-23) God has blessed us all with mothers who gave us birth. I simply want to dwell on this blessing today: women everywhere need to be honored, respected, and loved. So if this day brings joy to you, may you thank God for your blessings. And if this day causes you to struggle, remember that God loves, blesses, and protects us, even as a mother should, and God will heal your broken heart.

I will say this: I have a lot of “mothers” in my life. Of course, my mom, gave birth to me 45 years ago. I was about two weeks late, and she never let me forget it. (“Mom, I waited for 15 minutes at school!” “Yes, and I waited 14 days for you to be born, so you still owe me.”) I never figured out how that was my fault, but it worked.

Yet some other women have also mothered me throughout my life. I had two grandmothers, of course. They took me blueberry picking, to Tiger’s games, to Big Boy for dinner and dessert. Both grandmas were always saying things like, “Go help your mother,” and “Be nice to your brothers,” and “It’s time for bed; get under the covers.” Is it a requirement that grandmothers have to make their

advice rhyme? I also have seven aunts that pretty much fell into the same pattern, except I remember a lot more teasing from them.

Unrelated to me, I've had youth leaders, Sunday School teachers, neighbors, piano teachers, even high school teachers who fulfilled some role that included nurturing in my life. I owe my graduate degrees to several female professors whose encouragement led me through some real challenges. And even as a young pastor, I've had some faithful female saints in my congregations that watched out for me. True story: I once had a church council chairwoman call me, “Honey” and “Sweetie,” because I was the same age as her son.

My friend Ellie, mother of five, once compared herself to a mother bear with cubs. She said, “I'd kill to protect my children,” so we nicknamed her “Mamma Bear.” Although we laughed, the passion she expressed was real, and I'd wager some mothers in the room would feel the same. I bet you'd even die for your children.

[4] That's how Jesus feels about us. Christ loves us enough to die for us. Have you ever thought about that before? Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High God, the most important person in the universe, is willing to lay down his life so that you can be saved. This morning I want to talk about that love, and what it means for us.

[5] If you and I went out for coffee, just the two of us, and I asked you, “Are you a loving person?” I'd bet a dollar you'd say yes. I'd say yes, too. I may not be perfect, but my goal in life is to love God and love others. And yet, what if I asked, “Are you completely satisfied with how you love others?” that question might not be so easy to answer, “yes.” Furthermore, if I asked you right now, “Is there enough love shown in the world to one another by our fellow humans?” how many of you would say, “no”? That's the conundrum. We know we should love. We even have great personal examples of how to love, yet we know there is so much further we could go.

[6] I bet the disciples felt like they were above average on the kindness scale. After all, they walked with Jesus for three years, learning from all his teaching. But even those disciples had more to learn about love, which is why Jesus spoke to them directly on the night of the Last Supper. We read these

commands in John 15. "Remain in my love." (vv. 9-10) "Love one another." (vv. 12, 17) They are repeated several times. In fact, a quick search of the NIV shows the exact phrase, "Love one another" appears at least 11 times in the New Testament, mostly in the Gospel of John and the letter of 1<sup>st</sup> John. In other words, this is really important.

[7] There is a basic reason that Jesus has the right to command us to love. Your parents might threaten, "Be nice to your siblings, or else!" Yet Jesus demonstrates his love for us. Jesus says in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." This is the message of the cross, the foundation for Jesus' teaching. Before anything else, we must understand what sacrificial love really is.

[8] A pastor named Ferdinand Funk shared this story as an illustration.

*A soldier asked his officer if he might go out into the "No Man's Land" between the trenches in World War I to bring in one of his comrades who lay grievously wounded. "You can go," said the officer, "but it's not worth it. Your friend is probably killed, and you will throw your own life away." But the man went. Somehow he managed to get to his friend, hoist him on to his shoulder, and bring him back to the trenches. The two of them tumbled together and lay in the trench-bottom. The officer looked very tenderly on the would-be rescuer, and then he said, "I told you it wouldn't be worth it. Your friend is dead and you are mortally wounded." "It was worth it, though, sir," he said. "How do you mean, 'worth it?' I tell you your friend is dead." "Yes, sir," the boy answered, "but it was worth it, because when I got to him he was still alive, and he said to me, 'Jim, I knew you'd come.'"<sup>1</sup>*

In some ways, Jesus' love doesn't make worldly sense. That is the point. The love Jesus has for us is greater than this world has ever known.

[9] There is another exciting side to Jesus' love. Not only do we get to experience that love, we also get to reflect it. Jesus commands us to love one another because he knows we can do it. He tells his disciples to remain in his love. (v.9) Jesus tells them, if they obey his commands, they will always remain in his love. (v.10) Then he goes on to outline the benefits of remaining in his love.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/113759-john-159-17-commanded-to-love>

[10] First of all, the love of Jesus brings great joy. “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (v.11) I don’t know about you, but this pandemic has certainly been a joy-sucker for me. That’s why I need this reminder. Jesus gives us his joy. It’s not a fair trade at all. I give Jesus my sin, my burdens, my sickness, my sorrow, my pain, and I get his life, righteousness and joy? Yup. It’s called grace. Deal with it.

[11] Joy isn’t the only thing that we get from remaining Christ’s love. We also receive friendship with God. “You are my friends if you do what I command.... I have called you friends...” (vv.14-15a) I remember Pastor Louie Giglio once raising his eyebrows in disbelief as he preached, “Woah! Me? A sinner? A rebel? I am now a friend of God Almighty? That’s crazy!” Yet, it’s true. So many people run around hating God, making God into their enemy, blaming or denying God, when Jesus tells us that we can have friendship with God through the cross. Colossians 1:20 says, “God made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross.” (NLT) Friendship with God: that is a powerful reason to remain in Christ’s love.

[12] So we find joy and friendship in this love. What else? We can communicate directly with God. Listen again to what Jesus says: “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (v.15)

How well do you know your friends? Do you always know what they are thinking? Do you always know what they’re up to? Even the friends that you love the most might still be a mystery to you in some ways. Yet here Jesus says, everything he has learned from his Father has been made apparent to us who have chosen to follow Jesus. That’s some promise! Now, to be clear, I do not claim that we can fully know the mind of God. No way. However, we can be clear about some very basic facts. God created us for a purpose. God chose to redeem us through the work of the cross. God has a plan to reconcile the world, and that plan involves using us! I’ve been having the youth memorize Micah 6:8 lately. “Do justice, love faithfulness, and walk humbly with your God.” Why? Because so many people say, “I just wish I knew what God wants me to do.” Here is the

answer, folks! Love God, love people. Lay down your life for others the way Jesus did for us. We do know God’s will. And if we have any questions, we need to go back and read God’s word again. It’s all there for us, because Jesus has shown us God’s will and purpose for our lives.

[13] Yes, Jesus has the right to command us to love, because no one ever showed us a greater love than Jesus himself. Jesus is the only one who has the right to command us to love because he set the example. He laid down his life freely for us. The question is, will we respond to his love?

[14] There are two levels of response we need to consider. First, on a personal level, what does Jesus’ love mean for you? The gospel is simple. God loves you. God created you for a loving relationship, with God and with others. All of us, however, at some point in our lives have chosen our own ways. We’ve chosen sin and brokenness, pride and selfishness, harming our world, our neighbors, and ourselves. God looks at this dilemma and says, “I will save them. I will send my Son to die on the cross for them.” And that’s what Jesus did. The Son of God died on a cross, was laid in a tomb, and rose again on the third day to proclaim forgiveness and eternal life to all who would believe. To all who deny themselves, lay down their lives, take up their cross and follow Jesus, he gives eternal life. Each of us has the choice to believe, follow, and obey. So the first thing about understanding the love of Jesus is actually experiencing it as a born-again believer.

[15] There is a second level of response that is also needed. Remember, Jesus wasn’t just talking to Peter, or James or John. He wasn’t really even talking to just the twelve original apostles. Jesus meant these words for the church. What does this love mean for us as the church? In the congregation of Grace United Methodist Church, how do we show ourselves to be more loving?

[16] Jesus said we should be willing to lay down our lives for others. That might be literally possible, and it could also mean making sacrifices to show love to others. I’m talking about our time, our actions, our words and our money. Did you know that when you help your neighbor, even though you’d rather be home watching TV, you give of your life to honor God? When you hold back your anger, when you choose to speak kind words instead of the harsh words you really want

to say, you remain in the love of Jesus. When you give to God's kingdom through your church, you are participating in God's love. When you are generous, you experience the joy Jesus has for you.

The love that Jesus has for us is not passive. It is experiential. For us to truly say we belong to God, we have to show that we are obeying his commands. I hope and pray, my friends, that you do remain in God's love, and that the powerful love of Jesus will spur you on to amazing deeds as you practice love for one another.

Memory verse: John 15:13

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Reflection Questions:

1. Who has shown you great love? How?
2. When you think about obeying God's commands, do you experience joy? Why or why not?
3. How has Jesus shown his love for you?
4. How are loving Jesus and loving others related?
5. What is one thing you can commit to doing to follow Christ's command to "love one another?"