

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 6, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"You did not choose me but I chose you."

- John 15:16

Jesus speaks these words to the disciples and to us, to comfort us. He speaks them to increase our faith, to help us to abide in Him as He abides in us. Yet there comes a point when they also challenge us.

Because in our heart of hearts, in the sin-sick depths of our souls, there's a part of us, of me, of you, that wants to be in charge, or at the very least to contribute to our salvation in some way. Jesus' words here in John 15:16 don't allow for that, *"You did not choose me but I chose you."* It's hard to wrap our hearts and minds around the truth that *we did nothing*, He does everything for us. Yet, in this truth lies the greatest comfort for our souls. Your salvation is Jesus' work, by Jesus' own nail scarred hands.

He speaks these words to the disciples as part of what theologians call "The Farewell Discourse." Where Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul all focus on the institution of the Lord's Supper, Saint John gives us the details of what else went on at the table the night our Lord was betrayed.

Saint John begins his account with the Lord stooping to wash the disciples' feet and the giving of the new commandment, *"...that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."* So begins the Farewell Discourse as the Lord prepares the disciples for His crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

He tells them and us to *"believe in God, believe also in me,"* and that they already know the way to Father, because Jesus is, *"the way, and the truth, and the life."*

No one comes to the Father except through me." And He promises them that they will not be left to struggle through the world on their own. Jesus promises to send them and us the Holy Spirit, "the Advocate."

It's in this context that He begins His illustration of what it looks to abide in Him as He abides in us - as a branch abides in the true vine - which we heard last Sunday. Today we pick up where we left off. The Lord begins by promising us, "*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you: abide in my love.*" Notice, with whom the progression of the love starts? It starts with the Father who loves the Son, and then goes from the Son to you. But then notice what Jesus does, He doesn't tell you to do anything. He tells you to abide, and abide is passive. Just as the branch passively receives from the vine, so it is God who acts, it is The Father and the Son who love you. What do you do? Nothing. You simply abide in their love.

See, what we miss here, in our hurry to come up with something for ourselves to do, is the way Jesus sets this up for us. Once He says, "Now abide in my love," the only thing we could do of our own power is to not abide; to say, no thank you and walk away.

You didn't earn this love, you didn't make yourself loveable. God has simply loved you, and so you can receive His love, you can reject His love, but you can't do anything about the fact that God loves you. That's just a given.

Jesus says He tells you this for a reason, "*So that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*" Think about this: These disciples, the ones Jesus loves, the ones in whom He rejoices, and tells them so their own joy may be complete? These are the same disciples who in just hours will scatter like sheep without a shepherd. They are the same disciples who will deny Him and who will doubt His resurrection. Jesus knows this, and He loves them and rejoices in them, and He makes them His friends.

Friends of God. These men who will betray Him and deny Him are counted as His friends even when He knows they are about to fail Him. They are counted His friends even though they are about to fall away. This should be good news to our own hearts. If He can call them friends, if He can rejoice in them, if He can love them - He can love you, rejoice in you, make you a friend of God. Indeed it becomes all more clear that the love He has for them and for you, the joy He has in them and in you, the friendship He makes with them and with you is based on entirely on Him. And that is good news.

It is good news to those of us whose lives are marked so often not by our struggle with sin, but our failure to struggle at all. It's good news to those who look at their hearts, and their lives and see nothing but how wretched and truly unlovable they are. It's good news for sinners, it's good news for doubters and disbelievers, it's good news for those who fail in the fight against sin, death, and the devil. It's good news for you.

In fact the only person for whom it isn't good news is person who is convinced that God's love must be earned, that God's joy is only conditional on good behavior, that friendship with begins with me. That person will have their hopes, dreams, and efforts crushed.

Of course that person? That person is me, you, and well the whole human race, because that is how our old Adam, our old Eve, our sin-filled self has come to believe the world (and God) work.

Yet that's the logical way to think, isn't it? We know that the root of sin lies in our eating the forbidden fruit. We know that the brokenness of the world is our fault as humanity. And since it is, we know - don't we - that the only way to set it all right is for us to set it right. After all, you do the crime, you do the time, you break it, you buy it.

And so we approach God, His love, His joy, His favor, His friendship as something we need to earn or at least deserve. We look at the cross, and we see

the crucified Jesus, and we may even get that that's for us, but still we turn around and tell ourselves and others that to keep the love He showed on the cross, to remain in His joy, to continue to earn His favor, to prove our friendship to Him there are things we must now do for Jesus.

And that makes sense to us. It makes sense to our old Adam, our old Eve that God would work the way this broken world works where indeed all too often love, joy, friendship are conditional and transactional. It makes sense, but it's not true.

No, Jesus says, this is what is true, *"You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit."* This is the truth and mystery of our salvation - it is God's work by God's hands. For it is God, in the person of Jesus Christ who chose to go to the cross for you. He chose to become flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone. He chose to share in your conception, birth, life, and death. He chose to take your sin and make it His sin. He chose to bear your sin on the cross for you. He chose to make your death His death, your grave His grave. He chose to do this not for sinners in a general sense. He chose to do it precisely for you.

As you look at the cross and see Christ crucified know that He did this not just because He loved the world, not just because He loved sinners. He did this because He loved, and loves, you. You are the one He chose. You are the one He loves and whom He wants to abide in His love. You are the one in whom He rejoices. You are the one He calls friend, *"no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."*

Your life with Christ has never been dependent on you, only on Him and His Word. Your life with Christ is not about what you do for Him, it's about what He has done for you. This is what the Holy Spirit always wants to be front and center for you. This is what the Law will always guide you back to as it prunes back your own efforts to earn and deserve what Jesus gives freely. That Jesus has chosen you, and lain down His life for you, and that is enough.

But, someone will say, what about the commandments? Surely Jesus has expectations for his disciples? Surely there are obligations on our part? Surely there are things we must do? Yes, but not towards Jesus, not to receive His love, not to earn His joy, not to prove you are His friend.

"You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to bear fruit." The vine doesn't need the fruit the branches produce. The branches don't need to prove to the vine that they are worthy to be attached to it. Because the branch is in the vine it is appointed to bear fruit. Fruit for the birds, fruit for the animals, fruit to be pressed into wine, and to grace the table. You are appointed to bear fruit.

There are expectations, commandments, and even obligations... towards your neighbor. Your neighbor needs the fruit you bear. Your neighbor needs your good works. Yet even here, it is Jesus who acts first. It is Jesus who makes this possible for you.

When you abide in His love, His love fills you, His word fills you, He fills you, and His joy is in you. What follows from that is that His love pours forth from you in service to your neighbor. It's His love pouring forth which turns the humblest of acts into God's holy work.

His love pouring forth from you makes the most mundane things about which the angels rejoice to see: A mother nursing her child, a father changing diapers, a child washing dishes, a husband making bread, a wife fixing dinner, a toilet cleaned, a lawn mowed, a lesson taught, homework helped with, even a tongue bitten are the fruit of His Word, the fruit of His love, the fruit of your life with Christ; because through them your life is laid down, your old Adam is put to death again because you did these not for yourself, but because your neighbor needed this, because this gives life to your neighbor.

Because that is what God's Word does. That is what God's love does. It gives life. This is the fruit that Jesus would have you bear, that Jesus promises you will bear

when you abide in Him as He abides in you. Because this is what has chosen you for. You did not choose Him but He chose you, and He laid down His life through him you, that you may have life through Him and bear fruit. Amen.