

## “Abide in My Love”

John 15:9-17

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

Our Gospel reading this week is a continuation of last week’s reading where Jesus tells the disciples, “I am the Vine; you are the branches.” “The branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the Vine.”

This is important context for what we hear Jesus say today. If we don’t know that the words we hear today flow out of “I am the Vine; you are the branches,” then there could be confusion. And really, what we hear today needs to be understood as flowing out of this entire four chapter section of John’s Gospel where Jesus is talking to His disciples in the Upper Room on the night in which He was betrayed.

He keeps coming back to this word “command” or “commandment.” What is it that He has commanded of His disciples, commanded of you, commanded of me? Our sinful self, the Old Adam in us, hears this and wants it to be some work that we can do. O, how our Old Adam wants us to be able to justify ourselves before God by what we do – our pious thoughts, our kind words, our good works that help our neighbor. These are the things our sinful nature wants God to see coming from us – as if any of the good that we do flows from within

us. As if goodness and mercy naturally flows out of my heart. It doesn't. Whatever good I have comes from outside of me.

Whenever we read words like "obey" or "commandment," our sinful self reads this strictly as "law" – as something we achieve by our doing. As if God is providing a ladder by which we can climb up to heaven. The problem is that the English just doesn't convey the intention of the original language. In Scripture, "commandments" are not simply a set of rules. The commandments are what God has said "truth" is. They are the will of God for you expressed in words. God certainly desires pious thoughts, kind words, good works that help our neighbor. These are pleasing to God. These are commanded by God. But they do not naturally flow from our hearts, and there is nothing that you or I can do that gets us one step closer to the Kingdom of God.

"We are saved by grace, through faith, it is a gift from God, apart from works, lest any man should boast" [Eph. 2]. That being an absolute truth, for us English speakers, it can be puzzling as to why Jesus is talking so much about "commands" and "commandments" with His disciples in the Upper Room? "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love . . . This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you . . . You are My friends if you do what I command you."

So I am Jesus' friend only if I do what He commands? This is why we do not study the Bible by picking and choosing individual Bible

verses out of their greater context. If we say that the commandments Jesus is talking about with His disciples in the Upper Room are like the 10 Commandments, then I would have to conclude that I am not His friend, because I do not keep them.

The point that Jesus is making is “I am the Vine, you are the branches.” If you are not grafted or fused into Me, then you can do nothing. You can’t know God or believe in God. You certainly cannot think, speak, or do what is righteous in the sight of God. I am commanding you to believe that I am the Vine, so that the result will be that you will bear the fruit of righteousness and love one another – even if it means you have to lay down your life. “Greater love has no one than this.” If you want to see the love God has for you, look to the cross. As we celebrate Mother’s Day, ponder this thought – the love God has for you is greater than the love your mother has for you, and is greater than the love you have for your mother.

Jesus begins by talking about love. He says, “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you.” Our sinful self wants to run by this verse and get to the verses that tell us what we need to do. Don’t miss the point here. In the same way that the eternal Son of God is united to the Father by self-sacrificial giving for the sake of doing the will of the Father (it is the Father’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer, as we hear in Isaiah 53). In the same way that Jesus is united in self-sacrificial giving to the Father, so He is uniting Himself in self-sacrificial

giving to you. Just as you cannot destroy the oneness of the Trinity, so also He will never leave you or forsake you. You can be absolutely confident in the gift God has given you when the Son of God laid down His life for His friends. Greater love has no one than this.

“Abide in My love,” remain, exist in My love, Jesus says. Where does this existing come to us? This is the whole point, it does not come from your heart. I am the Vine. You are the branches. Abide in My love. He has already said before, “If you are My disciples, you will keep my Word.”

What this is all about is God’s eternal Word – the Word by which He spoke creation into existence; the Word joined with water that gave you new life; the Word which continually feeds you and builds you up; the Word of Life which flows from the Vine to the branches.

This word Jesus speaks again and again which gets translated into English as “commandment” has a greater meaning than simply rules to be obeyed. Think of it as an eternal truth expressing the full will of God which is to be believed. This is all about faith. It is faith alone that believes. Trust Him. Believe in Him and be sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see, as Scripture says. If you have that, good works will follow. Actions are the fruit of faith. A good tree bears good fruit, as Jesus says. More appropriately, we should say, a good branch bears good fruit because of the Vine. Amen  
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