

Rev. Dan Welch Easter 6 5-5-24 Text: John 15: 9-17 "The Secret to Loving Others"

Jesus has a simple command for us in today's Gospel: "Love one another." Love one another. That's it. That's the command. Yet, if you're reading through John's Gospel, especially chapters 13 through 17, these words sound so out of place. That's because this scene comes from the last night of Jesus' life, a night of ***hate, betrayal, and rejection***. How can there be love during such an unloving time?

That exact same question could go for our country and our world today. Jesus' words are for ***us***. Love each other. It is easy to talk about love here in ***church***. But go out into the world and we see hatred. Over the past two weeks dozens of college campuses all across the country have had ongoing protests erupt that have been anything but loving or peaceful. Antisemitism is practiced and accepted by an increasing number of people in our world today. That sentiment is especially prominent in these demonstrations which are much less pro-peace/antiwar like back in the 1960's America and more like the anti-Jew demonstrations of Nazi Germany in the 1930's.

In other settings, we Christians, too are persecuted, reviled, insulted for taking a stand against things that God's Word, the Bible clearly state as wrong, such as homosexual marriage, elective abortions, and more. In these and other ways, hatred towards Christians is on the rise and Jesus warned His followers of this in the very next verse after our Gospel reading today. In John 15: 18, the Lord states: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. "And again, two verses later where Jesus warns: "A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. "

In addition to hatred, Jesus also met with ***betrayal*** on that night when He gave this command to "love one another." Although few have experienced anywhere near the kind of betrayal Jesus endured, sadly some have been betrayed and abandoned by people who at one time were so close to them: spouses, partners, or friends.

Whatever the case may be, we're all aware of how difficult it is to maintain friendships over time and we're also cognizant of the fact that

relationships can be fragile. Close relationships are hard to build and hard to keep.

Then there is one more thing Jesus experienced in addition to hatred and betrayal that night, and that is **rejection**. Jesus would be forsaken by His twelve closest friends that very evening. And we also can relate to rejection and loneliness. Last year the United States' Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy published an advisory of what he warned is a "loneliness epidemic" in our country. In his words, "Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation has been an underappreciated public health crisis that has harmed individual and societal health."

Surgeon General Murthy cited that physical health consequences of poor or insufficient connection include a 29% increased risk of heart disease, a 32% increased risk of stroke, and a 50% increased risk of developing dementia for older adults. Additionally, lacking social connection increases risk of premature death by more than 60%.

<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>

In other words, so many people today in our world are lonely, living their lives in isolation without any close friendships. And it can take a serious toll on a person. Numerous people are looking for support and acceptance but find it hard to come by. How difficult it is for us to love in such a **lonely** time as **ours**!

Yet through all of this, the rejection and isolation, the abandonment and betrayal, and the hatred which we see and experience in our world, there is a secret for loving each other. And it is none other than this: Jesus' love. **Remaining in Jesus' love.**

In our text from Johan's Gospel, Jesus, the Son God, calls us His friends. And here is someone who **will** treat us right, always. His promise, as He says in our text is to fill us with joy. His promise is to give us what we ask in His Name. He even gave His life for us.

We all know how rare a good friendship actually is. Even though we need friends- we need someone to talk to, confide in, share with, and enjoy. And despite any hurt that we have experienced or are experiencing now, here is someone who loves us in spite of who we are. We come to

Jesus in honesty, and He will not turn away from us. We show Him what we really think and feel, and He still accepts us.

We long for this kind of friendship. His time is our time. His friendship is pure and good. His love is for us. How precious and rare it is to be **chosen** as Jesus' friend.

And chosen is exactly what we are, despite our sins and selfishness, Jesus chooses us. We did not choose Him, in fact, on our own we **could** not choose Him. On our own, before He came to us, we were dead in our trespasses and sin, St. Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 2. But in His great love and power Jesus He chose to bring us to spiritual life.

Jesus gave His all to choose us and make us His friends. "Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends." That is what Jesus did, He laid down His perfect life for us on the cross as a sacrifice for our imperfect, sin-infested, self-centered, lives. Because the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus, our Lord! (Romans 6:23).

Because He gave His all for us, we now give Him our best. We give Him the best of our praises, our offerings, our gifts, and talents. What is more, we share this Good News in this world that so desperately is need of Good News. We love one another, just as Jesus commanded. We can only do this because He first loved us. "This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and gave His life as a ransom for our sins. If God so loved us, we also out to love one another." (translation mine.) 1 John 4:10-11. We love because He first loved us. It's that simple.

A color that is often associated with love in our country and our culture is red, like red valentines' hearts. But, as we learned in our Revelation Video Bible study class a couple of weeks ago, the color red means a different thing in the Chinese culture, for instance. It's a color of good fortune. In oriental cultures, red is the color of choice for a wedding dress, unlike a white wedding dress in our culture. I was curious about the history behind the color red in the Chinese culture, and I believe I discovered the historical reason why as I was preparing for today's sermon. The following is a true story, which I think explains it:

Centuries ago a benevolent ruler named Goho, who lived on the island of Taiwan, tried to stop the ancient custom of human sacrifice. He wanted to substitute an ox or a pig for the annual human offering. It worked for several years, but then there was an extremely poor harvest. Tribal leaders immediately said that the animal sacrifices were not working; they needed to sacrifice a human. Goho wasn't able to convince them otherwise. So, Goho told them, "Tomorrow morning go into the forest and there you will find a victim tied to a tree wearing a **red** robe of sacrifice and a **red** cloth over his head. This is your next victim." The next morning when the men saw the victim tied to the tree, they rushed in and decapitated him. Only then as the cover fell from the head did they see that they had killed Goho, their leader. According to this story, Taiwan never again had human sacrifice. The red robe became the symbol of a changed life. When a person made a radical change for the better, he (or she) wore a red robe. Thus, the reason, I think for a red wedding dress, a changed life. But this story of loving sacrifice also points to the truth of Jesus' **incomparable** love for you: Jesus loved you and me enough to give Himself as a sacrifice on the cross so there would never have to be another sacrifice, animal, or human.

Out of His love, Jesus gave His life, His for you. "What more could He give?" But unlike the great leader Goho, Jesus of course, did not stay dead after His loving sacrifice. Jesus rose from death on the Third Day and because He lives, we will live forever also! One day we will know and experience Jesus' perfect love forevermore in His presence in heaven

And as we wait for that great day of Christ's return, we rejoice to follow Jesus' command as we live our lives now in this world. And that command is this: love one another; love one another as He has loved us. The command to the disciples way back then on the night of His arrest is just as much for us today.

Jesus' command stays the same: love each other. The world stays the same: hatred, betrayal, rejection, life lost. We are the ones who change. We become more loving because we are Jesus' friends and through His Word and Sacraments, He is alive and working within us. So, the secret to

loving others is to remain in Jesus' love. Remain in His love, as He comes to you through His Word and at His Table. Amen!