

Love Is Work

How do you let someone know about something important? Children, maybe you can tell me. When your parents want to make sure that you clean your room or that you bring your homework home from school, what do they do? They tell you. And then they tell you again. And then they tell you again. They tell you so many times that you get sick of having them tell you. But, you know, don't you, that if they keep telling you to clean your room and bring your homework home from school, it's important. And, it's something you need to work on.

We find the same pattern in the bible. In the last verse of the gospel this morning, Jesus tells us: *"17 This is my command: Love each other."* There is a whole lot of emphasis in that verse. First of all, Jesus says "I am commanding you." Note what Jesus is saying. He was telling his disciples: "I told you to love each other before. I'm saying it now. And I'll say it again." And what was his command? His command was to love each other. There again we find a present tense. True, Christian love isn't just something we talk about a little and show even less. It is something we *do*. True, Christian love is work.

And in these words, we see that it is work that Jesus commands us to do. He says: "I am commanding you: continue to love one another." But, long before he gives us these commands in these words, he speaks to us about *his* love for us. We back up to verse 12 and we hear Jesus telling us: *"11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 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."*

There is a mountain of weight in these words. Jesus is your friend. If I stopped this sermon right here, that thought alone would give you days of meaning to ponder. The God whom I didn't love and didn't choose and didn't earn—He's the one who came down to this world. He took on human flesh and blood. He became my brother, my Savior. But, even more than that. Jesus is my friend. What a profound, amazing thought.

And, just in case we were in doubt as to what sort of friend Jesus is, he tells us in detail. First, he's the sort of friend who would lay down his life for his friends. And his disciples saw just that. They saw him die in the place of not just them, but in the place of a world of sinners who did not want him. That is friendship! And even more than that—what sort of friend is he? He lets us know everything we need for life and salvation. God doesn't need to to that. He has every right to not explain himself. He has every right to do what he did to the people in the Old Testament. He has every right to say: "believe in a Savior. He will take away your sins. But I will not tell you his name. Nor will I tell you who he is." But our Father has let us know so very much about his Son and about life and salvation. That is the sort of friend Jesus is.

Jesus tells us: "I am your friend. Now, I command you, love each other." Jesus goes out of his way to show that he is our friend. And out of thanks for this great amazing friendship we have with him, he asks us to love each other. The difficulty is that we look into our lives and instead of seeing examples of Christian love, we find examples of self-love. Ten times in God's word we find verses where Jesus and his apostles tell us to love each other. And if we want to see how we are doing with our task of showing Christ's love to others, the bible has a very clear test for us. The bible tells us that true Christian love shows its love to those who need our love the most, Children and widows.

So, let me ask you: Do you love the children in our congregation? Would you be willing to be a Sunday School Teacher, so that you can share with our children the truth Jesus has shared with you? If you don't have the gifts to teach, would you be willing to help out our teachers on Sunday Morning or for VBS. Would you be willing to come to bible study to show them that being a Christian means growing in your faith with God's word. True Christian love does what is best for our little ones because they cannot teach themselves. And they need you to teach them what God's word says. They need you to show them what a Christian looks like.

Let me ask you: Do you love the widows in our congregation? Imagine that you were married for 50 years. And then God took your husband home. Who would be there for you? Who will run your errands for you? Who will talk to you and be a true friend? Who will visit you—especially when you go to the hospital? God's test is very

clear. How have you shown your Christian love to the widows in our congregation? Do you even know who they are? Our sister in Christ, Mary Lindke is in the hospital. We prayed for her last Sunday. Throughout the week, did you pray for her? Did you visit her?

Do you see what I am getting at? Love is *work*. You say you are Christians—and I don't doubt that. But, now do you see why Jesus told his disciples again and again to love each other? Our sinful hearts are so cold and calloused, so selfish and self-loving that they cannot look outward beyond themselves. They hate showing to love to children and widows. They hate gathering together for bible study with other Christians. Why? Because they want more than anything to worship and love *themselves*.

Love is work. It is work Jesus demands from you. It deeply saddens me to see you avoid gathering together with your fellow Christians. You do not know each other. Sure, you might know your own family. You might have a couple of friends. But, do you show your true, Christian love to the children in our congregation? Do you show your true, Christian love to the widows in our congregation? You have told me now for months that you would like this church to grow. If you can't even show your love to our children and widows, how can you show your Christian love to new people in our church?

It deeply saddens me to see this growing attitude in our congregation. And yet, in these words Jesus shouts out to us the opposite of sadness. He screams out to us the word, joy. In verse 11, Jesus tells us: "*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*"

Jesus promises to us that his joy is in us. Well, how could there be joy as we look into our hearts and see so much lazy, self-centered, self-love? We find Joy in what Jesus did for us. Jesus a true friend. Jesus is the *best* friend. Jesus laid down his life for me—for *me*. He laid down his life for a man who is selfish and self-loving and self worshipping. And he opened up his truth to *me*, so that I would know the truth and it would set me free from my sin.

And he's done even more than that. He laid down his life for me. But, he's also called me to bear much fruit. Jesus told his disciples: "*16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last*" What an amazing promise that is! Jesus promises to us, that because he loves us, we will naturally *want* to share that love. We will do more than wanting. We will share that love with those around us and be true, Christian friends because we know what sort of friend Jesus has been to us.

And so my brothers and sisters, show the love that Christ has for you. Show it to our little children. Show them a Christian that loves God's word. Show them a Christian who comes to church to worship Jesus—but even more than that. Show them a Christian who loves to learn about who Jesus is in bible study. Show them your love, not just with words, but with actions. Show your love to our widows. If you see a lady who might be a little older than you are and doesn't have a husband who comes to church with her, get to know her. Be a friend to her—a *real* friend. Be the sort of friend who listens to what she says and helps her in her need and visits her when she is sick. Be *that* sort of friend. For that is the sort of friend that Jesus is to you.

True, Christian love is work. It is work that Jesus demands from us and our sinful nature hates. But is is also a work that Jesus won for us. He won it for us by laying down his life and choosing us to bear much fruit. Amen.