

Gospel – John 15:1-6

The 11th Commandment?

Our text from today's Gospel is near the end of Jesus human life on earth. It is part of Jesus' lengthy discourse that begins in Chapter 14 and runs through Chapter 16. Chapter 17 contains Jesus' prayer for His disciples and Chapter 18 begins with His arrest and betrayal.

Last week we read verse 1 through 8 which set the stage for verses 9 through 17. Those earlier verses introduced the concept of our abiding in Jesus and our introductory verse for today continues that imagery with, "As the Father loved Me I also have loved you; abide in My love."

We note that while Jesus is telling us to abide in His love, He begins by introducing the idea that all things begin with the Father, "As the Father loved Me..." It is as if Jesus is reminding us that we must keep in mind that our abiding in Jesus is not just to receive the gift of His love, but it is also that we may be seen by the Father through the perfection of Jesus. It completes the imagery of verse 1 where Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." Jesus is the vine into which we are to be grafted, yet it is the Father who does the pruning.

It brings to mind my youth when my father got particularly upset with me and raised his voice as he disciplined me, it was my mother who later comforted me and said "your father loves you, he just needs you to try harder." It's God the Father who disciplines us and it's Jesus who comforts us and encourages us to "Try Harder."

Verses 9 through 11 speak of abiding in Jesus' love.

⁹ "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.

Jesus continues with the imagery of abiding in His love. The message throughout this part of Jesus discourse regards interrelationships among God the Father, God the Son, and the disciples.

From the beginning of this Gospel, John has emphasized the unity of God the Father and God the Son. Recall in the prologue that beautiful language, ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²

He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Then in Chapter 10, verse 30, Jesus proclaims, ³⁰ I and My Father are one.”

And finally, in His high priestly prayer, which He utters shortly before His death, Jesus prays, “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.”

The emphasis throughout this passage is on love; and love flows from the Father through the Son to the disciples. Yet this love flow from the Father through the Son to the Disciples is contingent on OBEDIENCE. If Jesus is not obedient to the Father, the world does not receive the Savior and the love flow is broken. So too if we are not obedient to Jesus, the love that Jesus has for us cannot flow to us.

Jesus said, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”

And as any good leader will do, Jesus, the perfect leader, leads by example and gives us a model of obedience. He kept all of the Father’s commandments, He accepted the “Cup” that the Father had prepared for Him, even though in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed that if it would please His Father that the cup be taken from Him, but ended by saying “Thy will be done.”

Jesus loved the Father and demonstrated His love of the father through his obedience, even to death upon the hardwood of the cross. And Jesus tells us that the Father loves Him because Jesus lays down His life in obedience to the Father’s will.

It is an interesting thing about love; love that is not based upon sacrifice cannot be true love. My love for Joyce cannot be true if it does not involve sacrifice on my part. My love of this congregation cannot be true if it does not involve sacrifice on my part. And too, my love of Jesus and God the Father cannot be true if it does not involve sacrifice on my part. Our sacrifice is the giving up of our will and rendering our will to those whom we love. Our love of God and Jesus is the rendering of our will to God through obedience to Him and His Son.

I was reading about this chain of obedience and love and came across an example that embraces this whole idea. The author wrote, “The image that comes to mind is that of nested dolls -- the kind that pull apart to reveal a smaller doll inside -- and inside of that doll there is a still smaller doll. Jesus invites us to obey so that we

might abide in him as he abides in the Father. If we abide in Jesus and Jesus abides in the Father, it follows that we also abide in the Father. The little disciple nestles into the larger Jesus, who then nestles into the great Father. This series of relationships is made complete as we keep Jesus' commandments.”

Keeping Jesus' commandments or obedience, are a key in our relationship with Jesus and God. John repeats this charge three times in Chapter 14 and early in Chapter 15. Our response may very well be, “OK, I got it...I got the message, I need to be obedient.” The problem is that we truly do not get the message. If we all, everyone, kept the commandment to love one another, through good times and hard times, our whole world would change. Even in our branch of His body, the church, we often fail by focusing on programs, buildings, and fund raising that we overlook the primary command of Jesus to love one another.

Then in verse 11 Jesus tells us, “*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*”

And in this, we need to accept that Jesus is not calling us to a dreary existence of obedience to dogma, but that He is calling us to JOY, and not to a simple fleeting moment of joy but to Joy that is FULL.

I was talking to Joyce about how we respond to work on A4D teams as being obedient to God's call. And how when we are on the team we invest ourselves and are obedient to the call God made to us through those who are leaders in A4D. And that while we come home exhausted from the weekend because of all the work that we do, we return filled with the joy of the Lord, and that joy is so great that it surpasses our exhaustion.

After assuring us that He wants our joy to be complete, Jesus tells us, “*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*”

The Greek language has three words for our English word love; *eros*, *phileo*, and *agape*. Each has a different connotation. *Eros* connotes erotic love, *phileo* connotes brotherly love, and *agape* unconditional love.

In Jesus commandment to His disciples, you and me, He uses *agape*, that is He commands us to have unconditional love for one another. Jesus says that He has had unconditional love for each of us and that we are to have unconditional love for one another. That means that there must be NO conditions to our love.

I want to point out one thing about this unconditional love that we are to have towards one another. Whenever different personalities are drawn together for a

common cause, there are often resentments that get in our way. Perhaps we see ourselves carrying a heavier burden than another. And this is a natural function.

Vilfredo Federico Damaso Pareto, who lived from 1848 to 1923, was an Italian industrialist, sociologist, economist, and philosopher. He made several important contributions to economics, particularly in the study of income distribution and in the analysis of individuals' choices. He observed that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population. This was later established as Pareto's Rule and is often referred to as the 80/20 Rule. It applies to most any area of our lives;

- in warehouses - 80% of the items shipped from a warehouse come from 20% of the items stocked,
- in our homes - 80% of our income is spent on 20% of the items we purchase,
- in church – 80% of the work of the church is performed by 20% of the people.

What does this have to do with our lesson from Jesus, to love one another unconditionally? Simply this: When 80% of the work of the church is completed by 20% of the people, resentments can arise.

Those who are fully involved may resent those who are not because they are not carrying their share of the load. And those who are not involved in carrying out the 80% of the work may be resentful of the others because they harbor feelings of guilt or perhaps believe the activities to be unnecessary.

You see, having agape love for one another is not easy. It requires a change of attitude and perhaps a change in participation. We need to seek forgiveness for our sin of resentment and seek a way in which we can remove the temptation.

After repenting of the resentment, perhaps those who are participating at the 80% level need to back off and give others a chance, and perhaps those who are operating at the 20% level need to step up and take on more responsibilities. Just because Vilfredo made the rule doesn't mean that the rule cannot be broken.

When I first thought of being ordained, I thought that I would apply to be a perpetual Deacon because I wanted to serve the Lord in His church I wanted to be a servant of the people. When I asked about this, I was encouraged to consider the priesthood because regardless of station in the ordained ministry all who are ordained remain Deacons for life.

And whether or not each of you has accepted fully your call, you too are called to be servants, servants of God, servants of Christ, servants of your brothers and sisters in Christ, and servants to a lost and hurting world. There is no escaping God's and Jesus' call on our life. There is no escaping their call on each of us to be obedient. There is no escaping our call to love one another unconditionally.

This agape love is not related to a feeling, it is not a synonym for the word like, it means simply that regardless of what a brother or sister in Christ does or doesn't do, we are to treat that brother or sister as if they were Christ Himself, for because they are Christians, they are in Christ just as are you, and Christ is in them just as He is in you.

This unconditional love extends so far as to be a call on life itself, calling us to lay down our lives for one another as Christ did for us. This is the servant hood to which each of us has been called. This is the obedience to which Jesus calls us. When we learn to accept this, we are ready to transform our world into a world that lives not for self but for the Love of Christ.

Amen.