

Rev. Beth J. Costlow

John 15:9-17

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Easter 6 Year B

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- “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,…” and then, “You are my friends only if you do what I command you.”
 - What?!? Anyone else here uncomfortable with the idea that we are only claimed by Jesus *if* we keep the commandments?
 - That sounds an awful lot like works-righteousness. Like we have to earn our way to God’s good favor.
 - I’m too Lutheran for that!
 - Justification by grace through faith, and all that. Right?
 - So let’s wrestle with it together.
 - First: This part of a fairly long section of John’s gospel that takes place in the same room where Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and issued the greatest commandment: Love one another.
 - Remember that? The verb was in a tense and voice that indicated no real expectation for obedience.
 - I preached it on Maundy Thursday. It’s more of a hope that Jesus has for humanity.
 - The context here is a bit different, as is the meaning.
- This time, the verbs are in the imperative. They are phrased as commandments.
 - Sort of.
 - Let’s start with the first sentence of this section: As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.
 - Greek matters! This is a command in English, but in Greek, it’s a matter-of-fact statement.
 - Not, “You must abide in my love.”
 - You made your bed, now you must lie in it!
 - Instead, “You abide in my love. Period.”
 - Vs. You made your own bed, now you get to lie in it.
 - “Have to” vs. “Get to”
 - Context also matters.
 - This comes immediately after Jesus tells his followers that they (we) are the branches of the “true vine”
 - This matters. A lot.

- Christians have already been grafted into the vine that is God’s love and, rather than commanding us to live in love, the language used here reminds us that we abide (which is to say, remain) there.
 - This is not a choice that we have made. God has grafted us onto the vine, and God keeps us there.
 - It is only after he reminds us this that Jesus goes into the “if-then” statements
 - And they’re not really “if-then.” They’re “since-then.” Or they’re “in order that”
 - What does that mean? And why is it important?
- “Since you keep my commandments, you abide in my love.”
 - Here, Jesus presumes that abiding in his love means that we keep the commandments.
 - No doubt he knows we’re imperfect at it. But we still abide in his love.
 - It also points to the gifts that God plants in us. We feed the hungry, not because we expect to earn brownie points with God, but because God helps us see the need, and empowers us to meet it.
 - We remain in God’s love. That’s Jesus’ promise.
 - We don’t fall out of favor with God when we fall short. We remain in God’s love.
- And then, “You are my friend *in order that* you do what I command you.”
 - Jesus claims us as his own, grafts us onto the vine, and holds us there *so that we love others*.
 - Jesus’ friendship does not fail us when we fall short.
 - Jesus doesn’t command obedience, but empowers us in it.
 - We don’t belong to God because we love others. We love others because God loves us.
 - And when we walk past that homeless man on the corner without offering him anything, Jesus does not distance himself or withhold his love from us.
- We Lutherans call that grace!
 - It’s real. And it’s abundant.
 - “You did not choose me but I chose you.”
 - The last sentence gets it right: “...so that you may love one another.”
 - Jesus chose us, so that we could love one another. And in him, we do.
 - Amen.

