

The love of a true friend.

Text: John 15:9-17 for 5/9/2021 by Pastor Bolwerk

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 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. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Think of someone you consider to be a true friend. What makes that person a true friend? Is it because they are someone you share common interests with? While that may be a starting point, we know there’s more to a true friend than that. A true friend is someone you feel a special connection with. It’s someone you can relate to; someone who understands you and you understand them. A true friend is someone you feel comfortable doing things with and sharing things with. A true friend is someone you trust.

Now as we think about our true friends, Christ comes to us in this portion of his word, and he takes that thought one step further. Jesus is teaching his disciples how to better understand their relationship with him, and as he does, he helps us to better understand what a true friendship is all about. Jesus wants us to understand ...

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1. It is a self-sacrificing love.
2. It is love that desires to share joy.

Jesus wants us to understand that the love of a true friend goes beyond just emotions. It is more than simply sharing common interests. Our Lord tells us what the love of a true friend looks like. He says, **“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”** (v. 13). Jesus was speaking these words to his disciples on night before he died. He was pointing ahead to what would be his greatest display of love for them, and for the entire world. Jesus displayed his friendship by completely giving of himself to save us all. True love is a self-sacrificing love that is willing to set aside all concerns about self. True love wants to do what is best for everyone else.

For us human beings who are contaminated with sin, it is extremely hard to love this way. We see this lack of selfless love in Jesus’ disciples. It would just be a few hours later when Jesus would ask three of his disciples to “watch and pray” with him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Did they do that? No, instead they slept. I suppose some might say, “Well, that’s not fair, those men were tired from working all day to prepare for the Passover meal.” Perhaps. But how many times was Jesus tired and yet he was still willing to give of

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himself to help others? In Mark's gospel we hear Jesus do just that. Mark writes, **Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [his disciples], "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things (6:31, 32, 34).** "We are going to go and get some rest", Jesus says. And when they get to this solitary place to relax a little does Jesus rest? No, he displays his love by teaching the people the saving truths of God's word.

Christ's selfless love makes our most caring love look pathetic in comparison. Our love is polluted with selfishness. When it comes to loving others, in some way, shape, or form we are always looking out for what's best for us. Even when we do willingly give of ourselves for others aren't we still expecting something in return, even if it's just a simple "thank you?"

If Jesus wants us to show our friendship to others by completely giving of ourselves, then how friendly have we really been? We need to ask ourselves, "Do we live and act as if we are friends of Jesus, or do we live and act as friends of the world?" We know the answer to that question, don't we? This is why we need Jesus! Without Christ's loving forgiveness we are lost. Without Jesus' loving kindness to change our selfish hearts we would never be able to live as friends of Christ. We would never be able to love as Jesus loves.

So where does that love come from? Jesus said, **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love"** (v. 9). The love of God comes to us from the Father through his Son. Jesus greatest display of love for us as his friends is seen in what he did for us on the cross. There our Lord set aside any thought of what was best for himself and demonstrated his tremendous love for the people of this world. It was love that held him on that cross, not the nails. Jesus hung there so he could make sure our selfishness, our self-centered lack of concern for others, and our sinful indifference would no longer be a dividing wall between us and our loving God. Jesus gave up everything so you could share in all that is his: His Father's love, his heavenly home, his eternal life. That is real love. That is true friendship.

And Jesus gives us that love through his word. Christ shares with us the truths of scripture so the Holy Spirit can give us the power we need to remain in Jesus' love. How do we "remain" in Christ's love? Jesus tells us, **"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love"** (v. 10). Obey his commands!? This sounds like we have to earn Jesus' love if we want to remain in it. But that is not the case. Jesus tells us, **"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you"** (v.12). **"This is my command: Love each other"** (v. 17). Loving others is how you remain in Jesus' love. So, how is it that we are able

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to genuinely love each other so we can keep Christ's command? God's word tells us, **"We love because he first loved us"** (1 John 4:19). The only way we can truly love anyone, other than ourselves, is when Jesus first fills us with his love. Christ's self-sacrificing love gives us the power to love. When we share Jesus' love with others, we are demonstrating that we are remaining in his love. We show our friendship with Christ by keeping his command to share that self-sacrificing love with each other. To remain "in" Jesus' love you have to give that love away!

As Jesus shares his true friendship with us, he wants us to see that he shares his selfless love with a purpose. Jesus doesn't just love us for the sake of loving us. He has a goal in mind. As Jesus shares with us the love of a true friend he is showing us that it is a love that desires to share joy.

Jesus said to his disciples, **"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete"** (v. 11). Jesus wants us to share in his joy. And Christ's greatest joy is sharing his Father's will with his friends. Jesus said, **"I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you"** (v. 15). Jesus regularly shared his Father's plan of salvation with his disciples so they could understand the full extent of God's love and forgiveness. Through the Scriptures Christ shares that same saving knowledge with you. Knowing we are forgiven because of Jesus' saving work brings us joy. The Holy Spirit uses that knowledge to empower your faith, giving you the ability to do things that are pleasing to God.

Jesus chose you and me to be his friends so we can know his truth and share in his joy. Now, Jesus says, **"I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last"** (v. 16). When we follow Christ's command to love each other that is when we produce good fruits of faith. Carrying out Jesus' command to love brings us joy. So how does keeping a command bring you joy? Think of the fruits of the Spirit the Apostle Paul mentions in his letter to the Galatians. Along with love and joy, Paul mentions **"peace, patience, kindness, goodness"** (Galatians 5:22). Does it make you feel bad when you are able to bring peace to a situation? Is it a bad thing to be patient with others? When you are kind toward others, and treat people with goodness does that leave you feeling sad? Of course not! Those things bring us joy! It is the joy of sharing Jesus' love with others. It is the joy of knowing we are doing what is pleasing to our heavenly Father. We also have the joy of giving, just as God has given to us. Think of all that God has given us: He has given us life, he provides for our physical needs, he graciously sent his Son to take away all our sins. Just as our heavenly Father has poured out his loving kindness on us, so we find joy in sharing his love and care with others.

But the ultimate joy that we have is in sharing Jesus with others. When we share our friend Jesus with our friends that brings us joy right now. We can have the joy of sharing with others the peace of Christ. It is the peace which comes from the forgiveness of sins.

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Do you know someone who struggles with under a load of sin? Do you know anyone whose conscience is plagued with guilt? Imagine sharing with them the knowledge that God the Father has forgiven them because Jesus has paid for all their sins. There is incredible joy in sharing with others the peace of Jesus' forgiveness. And this joy is not something temporary; it's not something only for this world. One day we will have eternal joy as we celebrate with all believers around Jesus' throne in heaven. True friends have the desire to share their Savior's joy with their friends.

How amazing it is to know that Jesus calls us his friends. As his friends Jesus loves us and shares with us everything he has learned from his Father. Your Savior tells you all of these things so that his joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. Now, he calls you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Christ has shown his self-sacrificing love to us. May that love move us to display that same self-sacrificing love to others. As Jesus shares his joy with us, may that joy overflow in us and flow out of us to others. May Jesus give us the strength to love like a true friend, so that one day we can share in Christ's eternal joy with all our friends. Amen.