

John 15:9-17

There is an old spiritual campfire song which begins, "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart." Later in the song the phrase becomes, "I've got the love of Jesus...down in my heart...down in my heart to stay." Anyone could sing these words, even if they had no such love or joy. We cannot see into the heart, and so we can sing all we want about what we have there, and no one can say otherwise.

Perhaps that's why Jesus doesn't tell us here in John 15 to have love in our heart; He tells us to love one another. Instead of commanding us to have love in our hearts, Jesus commands us to have love in our hands, in our feet, in our mouths. We don't love each other with our hearts; we love one another with what we say to each other with our lips, and with what we do for each other with our hands and with our feet. That's why St. John writes in his Epistle, "If we say we love God, but hate our brother, we are liars." Love does not stay "down in my heart" as the song says. Love must move to the hands, and feet, and lips, or it's not really love.

Do we love one another here at Christ Lutheran Church? Not, do we have love for each other, but do we love with our lips, and hands, and feet? And if we do not love one another whom we have seen, how can we truthfully say that we love God whom we have not seen?

Now please understand something...whatever I say to you, I also say to myself. Your pastor is not above the Law. Do you have a problem showing love? So does your pastor. Whatever words of God's Law condemn you, those same words condemn me as well. And all of us, pastor and congregation, need to hear God's accusing Law today. We also need to hear His gracious words of forgiveness.

In our text Jesus calls us His friends. And that's pretty generous. Because friends are loyal...always. Friends can be trusted. Friends can be counted on. "Greater love has no one than this," He says, "That one lay down his life for his friends." But we aren't even willing to lay down a tenth of our income into His offering plate. We aren't willing to commit to studying His words even one hour a week. We aren't loyal enough to Him to be found sitting humbly and expectantly in His House whenever He is here for us with His Word and Sacraments. It might be tempting for Him to say, "With friends like us, who needs enemies?"

And this is what we once were--His enemies. St. Paul tells us this in Romans 5. God's enemies are opposed to what He is doing. And that was us. We were against Him at birth. We had no love for God. We were not loyal, or trustworthy. We could not be counted on. We were not born friends of God, but enemies. But your baptism changed that. What you once were is now only in your past. Now, here in the present, you are Jesus' friends. He does not say, "You were My friends," or "You can be My friends." He says, "You are My friends." This is one of the blessings that is yours in your baptism. You are declared a friend of Christ there.

And if we are Jesus' friends, then we are all friends of each other. If we are His friends, then we will show love to one another. We will not be against each other. We are not enemies here at Christ Lutheran Church. We are friends. The problem is that we are friends, but we are also sinners. And so we are not perfect friends, but sinful friends. And sometimes, therefore, we don't act like friends; we act like enemies. We don't use our lips to say the kindest words to each other. We don't use our lips to say, "I forgive you," to each other. We don't use our hands and feet to help out our friends in

need the way we could. We sometimes use our hands and feet against our friends here, and to keep our friends away. There are times when someone may wonder not only if we truly love each other here, but if we even like each other, because some days we act like we don't.

If that's going to change, then it's going to come from God. From these, His words, to you," You are My friends." You see, Jesus doesn't just say these words with His lips; He also says them with His hands and feet. That's where the nails were driven through--into His hands and feet. With everything that he was and is, He made you His friend. "Greater love has no one..." He says, "Than to lay down his life for his friends;" but He laid down His life for us when we were His enemies. Jesus did not die for you because you were His friend, but because you were His enemy. We did nothing for Him. We were against Him. Not loyal, not committed, not trustworthy--enemies! And He showed love with His lips, hands, and feet by dying on a cross for us. And you were brought into that love in your baptism. And you are given that love in His Holy Supper. And that love declares you to be Jesus' friend. It's not what you do that makes you His friend; it's what He does for you.

I need to tell you a story here shared by another pastor. A lady in his congregation whom we'll call Jessica, had a husband who suffered a terrible accident at work. He was crushed by a number of heavy pipes. He worked in an oil field. He didn't die, but the doctor said it would have been better if he had. He was in a coma six months and in the hospital for many more months after that. When he came home he wasn't even a shadow of the man he once was. He could barely speak. When he did, he told his wife Jessica, over and over again, "Go away; I want you to divorce me." He loved this woman and pitied her, and he did not want her to be tied down to caring for him, day and night, for the rest of his life. He wanted her to divorce him and find someone else; someone who could show love to her. But she didn't. She committed herself to him. "In sickness and in health, for better or for worse," she had promised. And though he could not show love to her, she kept loving him.

We're like that man in that we are unable, or often just fail, to show love to God and to others here. And we, too, may want just to be left alone. We may feel very unlovable; not worth caring for; not worth dying for. Like Jessica, God is committed to you. He loves you not because you love Him. He calls you His friend not because you are loyal and committed to Him. God is not against you; He is for you. He loved you because you were against Him; because you were His enemy. He calls you His friend because He laid down His life for you.

Friends of God, and my friends, God forgives you for having been His enemy. He forgives you for acting like His enemy even though you are not. He forgives your disloyalty; your non-commitment to Him. If He died for you when you were His enemy, then won't He keep forgiving you no matter how you act as His friend? Even though we fail to love each other here at Christ Lutheran Church with our lips, hands, and feet, the way we should, He forgives both pastor and congregation. And through that love, that forgiveness, He enables us to show love to one another.

"Love each other," He says, "As I have loved you." He loved us when we were His enemies. So even when we are less than friendly to each other, and when others here are less than friendly to us, we can still show love...we can still forgive. "Love each other," He says, "As I have loved you." That's the kind of love Jessica showed to her husband. Though he could not show love to her; though he did not want her love, she still showed love to him.

This is, is it not, Christ Lutheran Church? We're all about Christ here, are we not? His words, His Supper, His forgiveness, His love--it's all yours. And so in Christ--through Him who strengthens us--we can love one another. Amen.