

## **John 15:9-17**

Nine times in these nine verses we hear the word “love” or “loved.” Three times in verse nine alone. We might well assume that our text in John 15 is about love. But we also hear the word “command” or “commandment” five times in these same verses. So perhaps the gist of what Jesus is saying here is that we are commanded to love.

But we hardly need a sermon if that is the essence of these verses. We just need a pep talk. And isn't it true that most people view sermons in just this way--as pep talks...motivational speeches? Don't congregational members come to church to get fired up? In this way of thinking, Christian worship is comparable to a businessmen's conference, or an athletic pep rally. You who gather here on Sunday mornings are seen as Christians who want to sharpen your skills and make a difference in the world.

Today being Mother's Day, let's see if this same model works for mothers, and fathers, raising their children in the home. Is it the goal of a mother to rally her children on a daily basis, to sharpen their skills, so that they make a difference in the world? Well, yes, this is true. But if that is the purpose of motherhood, children do not need a mother in the home; all they need is a coach, or a cheerleader, or a motivational speaker.

God gives children a mother because children need someone who will love them; who will cry with them; who will sit with them when they are sick; who will teach them to pray; who will raise them in Christ Jesus.

For the same reason, God gave you to your mother, the church. If all you want is to sharpen your skills as a Christian, to get fired up so that you love others better, you don't need the church; you don't need Baptism, or Holy Communion, or a pastor who preaches the Gospel; you don't even need Jesus. Just grab a do-it-yourself book from the local Christian bookstore and you're good to go. There are plenty of people out there in the world who are sharpening their skills and making a difference. They're nice people, and they show plenty of love to others. And they do all this without ever sitting in a church pew, or kneeling at the Communion Table.

But Jesus has something different in mind for you. He gave you to your mother in the home to raise you, by teaching you right from wrong, and by loving and forgiving you no matter how wrong you were. And so also Jesus brings you here on this Mother's Day to your mother, the church (and not just today, but faithfully He draws you here) so that you know and abide in His love--through your Baptism, through hearing His words of life for you, through receiving His Sacrament.

It's one thing to love others. It's another thing entirely to know and abide in Jesus' love, and then His love reaches out through you to others. That's what Jesus wants for you. That's what makes His joy complete. No mother wants her children to show love, both to her and to others, because they have to. A mother's joy comes from her children being full of love for her and for others because this is the desire of their heart.

And this must begin with the mother. If all she does is to command them, but not love them, not sacrifice for them, not give of herself to them, her children may love, but not from their heart.

Jesus loved you fully and completely. He gave Himself up for you on a cross. He gave up His rights and was willing to suffer hell for you because this is what we deserved for our sins. No one ever loved as Jesus loved you. And now when He says, "*Abide in My love...This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you,*" He is not forcing you to love out of coercion; He is putting His love in your heart, and through that love being there, He is loving others through you.

When we speak of love, we often picture a feeling, an emotion. But we miss the point if we picture God's love in this way. "*As the Father has loved Me,*" Jesus says, "*so have I loved you.*" He is speaking here not of a feeling, but of an action; something that He did for us. We hear this from our mothers in the same way: "I gave birth to you...I nursed you...I changed your dirty diapers...I got little sleep because of you." That's love--mothers sacrificing for their children. And that's God. God is love. He knows no other way than the way of self-sacrifice. He did not hold His nose when He saw us in our filthy condition. He embraced a cross so that His precious blood now cleanses you and me of all our filthy sins.

With true mother-love, God gave you birth through His church. He nursed you with the pure milk of His Word. He taught you right from wrong. And even though we daily choose what is wrong, He does not reject you. He forgives you out of pure mercy. For Jesus' sake, He declares you completely forgiven.

No child chooses his mother. Nor did we choose God, or choose our mother, the church. "*I chose you,*" says Jesus, "*and appointed you to bear fruit.*" Was that a good choice? Sometimes we may wonder. We look at the fruits of love in our life, or lack thereof, and we're not so sure Jesus made the right choice. I don't love others the way I could. My love is pretty selfish at times. I don't love God the way I should. And it shows in how little I serve, in my measly offerings, in the way I don't listen well when His Word is preached and taught.

Friends, Jesus' love for you is not based on your love for Him and for others. He did not choose you because of the love that's in your heart, but because of the love that is in His heart for you. You are God's choice. You are His precious child. He will never turn away from you, not even in our worst moments. He loves to forgive His wayward children. He delights in showing mercy.

That's why we love. It's why we love Him and one another...because God, who loves you, is in your heart. He is not a feeling. God is not an emotion. He is the One who acted for you. He laid down His life for you. And now He acts through you so that you are one who loves others the way a mother loves her dear children. Amen.