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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Sixth Sunday of Easter (Series B)

May 10, 2015

Text: John 15:9–17

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, “Abide in my love” (vs. 9). What does that mean? That Jesus has really strong emotions for us? That He really likes us a lot? Love can be a difficult subject to discuss. What is it? A feeling, an emotion, a decision of the will? Our English language doesn't help matters much for love contains all these aspects. We say that we love sports; we love our pets; we love our children; or we love our moms (Happy Mother's Day Moms!). Should I equate the love I have for Jesus with the love I have for my favorite piece of music? Or even the love I have for my wife and kids?

Jesus did say “abide in my love.” Before He said that, however, he said (in the same vs. 9), “As the Father has loved me, so have I love you. Abide in my love.” Wow! That puts things in a new and more glorious light. The love we are to abide in, the love that Jesus invites us to live in as His disciples is a divine, Trinitarian love. Abiding in the love of Jesus means abiding in the love the Father has for the Son, and the Son for the Father.

So what is this love Jesus is speaking of? This love is a self-giving, self-sacrificing love that cannot be overcome, diminished or destroyed. It includes our emotions, our intellect and our will, but is greater than them all. I Corinthians 13 describes Christian love most completely. I commend to you the entire chapter but for this morning's purpose I will read vs. 4–8, “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”

This is the kind of love that God the Holy Trinity shares within the Trinitarian life; the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit loving each other in the unity of their one Divine nature. The Christian gospel is the message this imperfect, messed-up world with that same, perfect love.

If you want to see perfect love, then you must look to Jesus on the cross. For God so loved the world that He gave His Son unto death so that sinners can be released from an eternity without His perfect love. Between each agonizing breath, the God-man was loving the world. Preaching about Jesus' death and resurrection is not some morbid preoccupation with suffering but a joyous embracing and celebration of God's perfect and life-giving love. Preaching Christ-crucified and resurrected, as Paul says in I Corinthians, is preaching the love of God.

This divine, holy love experienced within the life of the Holy Trinity is the same love given to Christian disciples. Look again at vs. 9, "As the Father has loved me (that's the inter-Trinitarian love), so have I loved you (that's Trinitarian love being shown to disciples). Abide in my love (Discipleship is living in the divine love of Jesus)." God the Father loves the Son in perfection and the Son also perfectly loves the Father in return. Jesus says He loves you and me with that kind of love. Jesus came to this earth to make a way for us to receive and live in His Father's love for all eternity.

That's absolutely stupendous! This divine love, as described in vs. 9, provides the motivation for evangelism, Sunday School, VBS, offering weekly worship services and Bible studies: that sinners of every shape, stripe, various, and conviction, might know, experience, and forever live in the love the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have for each other. We aren't interested in the Church growing here and around the world so that we can say our Church is larger than that Church, or that our budgets are greater than others, or that we have programs aplenty. The motivation must always be: that sinners might abide forever in God's love.

What's even more glorious is that as far as Jesus is concerned, we are already perfectly loved, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." No longer are we separated from fellowship with God. As the Father loves Jesus, so Jesus loves us. Perfect, I Corinthians love, that love that endures all things, believes all things, hopes all things, etc, is already shed abroad into our hearts given to us in the waters of baptism, preaching, and Lord's Supper.

The world and our sinful natures may rage against us with terrifying ferocity but Jesus loves us even as the Father loves us. The Father would not let His beloved Son remain in the grave. He will certainly not abandon His beloved people to the power of the death and the devil. Easter triumph, Easter love. Nothing, nothing can destroy that love He has for us. Not our sins, not our failures, not our sicknesses, nothing in the present or the future. His love for us is steadfast and ever abides. "As the Father has

loved me, so have I loved you.” That’s a promise you can face all temptations with, that will sustain you through every trial, even when facing your last hour. As the Father loved Jesus, so Jesus loves me, so Jesus loves you!

As if this weren’t good enough, the Lord Jesus brings us deeper into the divine, Trinitarian life. Vs. 10, Jesus says, “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.” Jesus didn’t keep His Father’s commandments in order to earn His Father’s love. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father in perfection already. Jesus kept His Father’s commandments because He loves His Father.

We keep his commandments and so return love with love by living and abiding in Jesus through faith. Jesus kept the commandments of the Father because He abides in the Father’s love. We keep Jesus’ commandments because we abide with Him in love through faith. Christ’s faithfulness and perfect love come to us; we live in it moment by moment. From that relationship, lives of love and obedience are lived.

Do we not confess this very thing – that works of love reflect the love that is already there – in the explanations from the Small Catechism? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things is the explanation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment. The explanations to the remaining 9 commandments follow this consistent pattern, “We should fear and love God so that we...” do not do these evil things and in turn do these good things. Such is the life of abiding in the love of Jesus but never earning His love. That’s already given freely and without reservation.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 11, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” It seems to me people could use a lot more joy in their lives. Not giddiness or entertainment, we’re drowning in such things in our country. But true joy is lacking by and large. Once again, this joy is a divine joy, “that *my* joy may be in you...” That deep seated happiness and contentment experienced within the Trinitarian life is given to you too! Yes, it’s yours, says Jesus, “that your joy may be full”. As full as the joy the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have for each other. That why the Bible, in another place, calls it joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The love that Christ gives to His Church and which we share with one another is the longing of every human heart. From the very beginning, God created all people to live in His love, to share His love with one another. The Christian Church is the

restoration of God's goal and purpose of all people living in His love. Abide in my love, says Jesus, and love one another.

We are chosen in Christ for this very reason; to receive His love and joy and to love one another and so rejoice in Christ together as one holy, redeemed body of believers. Even though we are vastly different in age, temperament, political persuasions, gender, you name it, we are called to love one another with the love that the Father and the Son share with us. We may look different, think different, act different; but it makes no difference. We love each other with Christ's love and so abide in Jesus' love and joy.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.