

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

When you think of the word love, what comes to your mind? For me, when I think of the word love, I think of my Mom. When I was growing up we didn't always have the easiest life. Until she remarried my father our finances were tight. But my mom was resourceful. I remember every Friday night she would take us to the toy store and let us play with toys for hours, and at the end of the evening we'd leave empty handed but happy has a lark. My mom was strong when I needed her to be. She was comforting when I was in distress. She was strict and stern when I was out of line or needed some coaching. And there was and is nothing, and I mean nothing, my mom wouldn't do for me. She loves me, like really loves me. She loves me constantly and unconditionally. Now don't get me wrong, she doesn't always like what I do, but she always loves me. For these reasons and many more than I have time to share with you right now, when I hear the word love, I think of my mom.

What comes to your mind? In our world today the word love gets thrown around all the time. It's in short television ads to describe how someone feels about a certain product. It's a slogan for a popular adult beverage, "Love you man!" It's joked about in the hallways at schools. It's uttered out of the mouths of middle school boys to girls who really have no idea what love really is. Is that what you think of when you hear the word love? Or do you think of your spouse or partner? Do you think of your children? Do you think of a certain thing or place or feeling? Do you think of a song, perhaps?

When I hear the word love, I also think of Jesus' words in our Gospel lesson that we just heard read. Today's lesson is a continuation of last week's dialogue, remember the vine and its branches? Jesus had just told us that he will always, always abide in us and us in him, that we are

connected. And now he's giving us a description about what that will look like, a job description if you will. Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. This is my commandment. Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." So for us to abide in Jesus and Jesus to abide in us, we are to love our neighbors as God loved Jesus and as Jesus has loved us.

I'd like us to take a minute and think about what it is Jesus' love looks like. What do we know about Jesus' love? From the Scriptures we know that Jesus loved all kinds of people. He loved rich people and poor people. He loved people in power and people who had none. He loved those who were outcast and those who were accepted by society. He loved old people and children. Jesus loved people who lived in towns and those who were out in the country, even those who lived in cemeteries. Jesus loved all people.

From the Scriptures we also know that Jesus loved without exception. We know that Jesus loved those who society considered to be unclean. We know that Jesus loved those who society blamed illnesses on the sin of families for generations. We know that Jesus loved those who struggled in life, those who didn't feel like they belonged at the table. We know that Jesus loved women who society looked down upon for their past. We know that Jesus loved those who after years of discipling would betray him and hand him over to be mocked and killed. Jesus loved all people.

From the Scriptures we know that Jesus' love included forgiveness. There is story after story in the New Testament of Jesus' forgiving people for things. The woman at the well. The thieves on the cross. Jesus tells us that because we love our neighbors we should forgive more over than the expected seven times, but even more so, seventy-seven times. He tells parable after parable of masters forgiving debts. And Jesus spends his last night on earth sharing a meal with

his disciples that is a means of grace, or a means of forgiveness. We hear Jesus' words, "do this for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus' love showed forth in forgiveness.

Jesus' love lasts from this life into the next. Jesus' love for us doesn't stop when we do things that disappoint him. No, he accepts us anyway. His love doesn't stop when we betray him, no he continues to love us anyway. His love doesn't stop when we choose other things over him, no he chooses us anyway. Jesus' love follows him to the cross. Jesus' love leads him to lay down his life for the sake of the world, for the sake of you and me. And God's love, the heart of Jesus' love overcomes death for his creation, for his people, for us.

That my brothers and sisters is how we are called to love our neighbor. We are called to love our neighbor unconditionally, when things are going smoothly and when things are a bit more challenging. We are called to love our neighbor when they are making good choices and doing good things, and also when they are doing things they shouldn't be, things we don't agree with. You know the famous saying, hate the sin but love the sinner. Yea, that fits in here. We are called to love our neighbors when they have similar view points to us, but also when they don't. We are called to love by choosing them, by accepting them, by not making them fit into a particular box. We are called to love our neighbor with forgiveness when things don't go exactly as they should. We are called to love our neighbor always, even unto death. Our death. For the sake of the other. That's what Jesus did. That's what he's calling us to do.

Love isn't easy. It's easy to say, but not really so easy to do. It's hard work. Especially love that looks like Jesus', the kind that reflects God's love. God loves us tremendously, radically, over the top, abundantly, excessively. God always chooses us. God always accepts us, without exception. And God loves us from this life into the next.

Today Jesus tells us that this love is the best and most important thing that we can do as his followers. And as usual he leads by his example. So, I ask you, how are we doing with this commandment? How well are we loving in all the ways set before us by Jesus? I don't know about you but I have a lot of room for improvement. So today I invite you to set your eyes upon the way Jesus loved, the way he interacted, the relationships he formed, and go and do. Be love to a world who so desperately needs it. Be acceptance in a place where there is none. Be forgiveness in a world that doesn't offer it. And point this world to the cross, where the greatest gift of love was born. Amen.