

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

*On the night of his arrest, Jesus delivers a final testimony to his disciples to help them in the days ahead. Here, he repeats the most important of all his commands, that they love one another.*

[Jesus said:] <sup>9</sup>“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup>“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

“This is my commandment, that you 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. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” It is in these few verses that Jesus crystallizes the directive of the Christian faith. It is in these words that Jesus, in his final testimony to his disciples, lays out what is important for him for his followers to adhere. Jesus tells his closest inner circle what is of priority as they live their lives beyond his physical presence with them.

What is important in life? I suppose in many ways we ask that question in various forms almost all of our life. It is a question that probably has been asked of us through all our stages of life - by our grandparents, by our parents, maybe our bosses at work, during interviews, while attending colleges, and likely many other situations in which somebody is trying to find out something about our outlook on the world. What is important about life is something that we also try to pass on to the next generation, whether we are a teacher at school, or mentoring someone in some way, intentionally or unintentionally, and most particularly, certainly when one serves as a parent to young children, as well as teenagers. We are always directly and subtly teaching our offspring about what is important in life. What is important in life are the things that we give our allegiance to, the things in which we wrap our decision making around, those things to which we give our money, those things to which we devote our time. So, if someone was to shadow you today and this week, what - by observing your life - would they discover is important to you?

Many of you know we have a preschool here at our church, All God’s Children, which has a very telling name. Which, by the way, just again achieved the highest five-star rating by the state of Ohio, in the Step Up to

Quality program for the next three years. Congratulations to our director and staff for making this happen. However, one of the things that defines us as a church preschool, as a ministry of this congregation, is trying to communicate even to the smallest among us what is important. And for even our three and four-year-olds that enter this building during the week, we emphasize that they are a child of God, and that God loves them. This is what we value as highly important during their time here, along with education readiness. The name All God's Children is revealing.

Again, that question: if someone was to shadow you today and this week, what - by observing your life - would they discover is important to you? It is not hard to make the case that sometimes what we place significance on, what we place hard core values upon, turn out not to be the most important things that we ultimately think are important, for too often we know that things can get out of whack; things, situations, and demands can quickly swallow us.

Many of you know that this old aging pastor is a parent to an eight month-year-old. And going through parenthood again has reminded me of many things. I am convinced that one of the things that infants and small children must think is very important to know about life, is the sounds that animals make. Because it seems we are always quizzing them, and imparting on them all the sounds that various animals make. I guess if I was a small toddler, I would be thinking apparently it is very important in my life to what sounds all the animal make in this world. It must be very very important to my success because every time I see an animal in person, in a car, on TV, or in a book, all these big people emphasize what sound they make.

Can you imagine if every time we saw creation at work, we saw people getting along, people carrying for each other, people in church in worship, that we emphasized to our newest generation – look – see how much God loves, and see how people are loving another? Because, folks, like it or not, as scary as it can be – the number one factor in our young people deciding to be a part of the faith, is what we model to them. If we model an importance of our faith to those growing up behind us in years, there is a high possibility that our young people will wrestle with those faith aspects as well – even if they make different decisions. The biggest pratfall that often happens in the church is the “dome light syndrome” of parenting the Christian faith. Dome light syndrome means that the only time the parents of church youth are seen at the church is when the dome light comes on in their car when the door is opened to drop off their children. Sadly, it is often those same parents who later question, why their teenager, college, and adult children dismiss religion so easily. Now this is not about guilt tripping one another, there are many understood factors of parents and youth involvement in church including, navigating schedule demands, single parenting, separation and divorce, along with job pressures, etc. The point is that what we model as important for our lives, is often passed on to the next generation to at least grapple with for their own priority making.

In our gospel text this day, as we continue in this journey of Easter, the Gospel of John flashes back to the disciples and Jesus right before he is arrested and crucified. It is in today’s lesson that we hear Jesus spell out what is important for his followers in the faith. He gives them one very direct command: love one another. I think if Jesus bothered to emphasize this to his closest followers, as he was soon to depart them, I’m just

guessing that he meant it for us and the world to continue to be an important yet today. So how are we doing? How is the Christian world practicing this command?

Is the loudest voice coming from the Christian faith in line with the prioritized one commandment Jesus gave his followers? Is the dominating message of the Christian faith, now in 2018, corresponding with Jesus' directive to his followers? If we stop the next ten un-churched people in the cars traveling along route 21 in front of our church and asked them what is the dominating message of Christianity that they have heard in their life what would you guess their answer to be? Would they say: I have always heard them say that it is to love one another?

Is that why mainline Christianity has experience a negative reaction among those who have fallen away from the church, those who have never been to church, and those of other beliefs? Are they saying – You know those Christians – all they speak about, all they seem to be about, is their Savior's command to love another, and that just turns me off?

Tragically, I'm not so sure. Sometimes in the Christian faith, sometimes as a wider church, sometimes as a congregation; sometimes as individual Christians, we have been guilty of sending other stronger messages like: You better not be doing this – You are not worthy – You do not belong – You need to be more like us – You are on the outside – You should be ashamed. In times like this, we are reminded that Jesus' parting words before his death and his first words to his disciples after his resurrection did not chastise them, did not blast them, did not scold them, did not shame them. Instead Jesus embraced them, taught them, forgave them, and loved them. May we be so bold to be known as Christians by our love. Amen.