

# Hopkins South Monterey

## United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

May 9, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

John 15:9-17

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 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. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 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. 16 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. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Prayer & Sermon

*God of love and new life,*

*Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.*

According to my Facebook friends, apparently this past week was Teacher Appreciation Week. If ever there was a year to be appreciative of teachers, it is this one. They have all taken on so much throughout this pandemic season. It is well-timed that this week led us into Mother's Day. No matter the gender, our teachers are often one of the main "mothering" relationships in our lives. One that nurtures us and our kids to grow into the person they are meant to be, that creates safe space to explore and learn, that processes alongside them when things don't make sense or are hard. Teachers can

be one of the most influential relationships in our lives from Kindergarten all the way through college or even graduate studies. I maybe don't remember every name of every teacher I have had, but there are many that stand out as highlights that made an impact on my journey. My third grade teacher that remembered me years after I had moved on from his class. My gruff high school math teacher who let a group of us escape the jungle of the cafeteria and eat lunch in his classroom every day. My history teacher who sewed dozens of costumes on her own time to bring the French Revolution alive for us. My Spanish teacher who would talk to me for an hour or more after school about anything and everything. My thesis advisor who would welcome me into his office no matter how many times I had already met with him that week. The professor I had for one class, outside of my major, but remembered me and that I was going to go into ministry. The thing that set all of those teachers apart from the rest is the love that they shared, both for the students and for their job. What a difference it makes when their foundation is love instead of power and authority or even just ambivalence. It is this kind of love that Jesus is teaching about in John 15. A way of being and living that acts and exudes love. A way of being that isn't focused on hierarchy or power. A way of being that lives out love as an action instead of just a squishy emotion.

The last couple weeks we have been circling around this theme of love. We spent the last two Sundays focused on passages from the letter of 1 John. Today we hop back to the Gospels, back to John. If you heard and remember anything from that letter of 1 John, you probably recognize some of the ideas from the letter being shared by Jesus in the passage we have heard this morning. Some Biblical scholars believe that the letters of first through third John are written by the same author as the Gospel of John or the letters are written as a continuation of passages in the Gospel. Reading this part of John 15, it definitely sounds quite likely. Many of the exact phrases in 1 John can be found in this Gospel text. So, what is new to be found in John 15 that we haven't talked about already? Well, there are a few important pieces unique to this passage that we didn't hear in 1 John sprinkled in.

The passage starts with something familiar to us coming from 1 John, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." I realized while reflecting on this first line, that I was a little unsure of exactly what "abide" means here. The secular dictionary definition is: "accept or act in accordance with" or "be able to tolerate" or "continue without fading or being lost." These don't seem like impossible definitions within the context of Jesus saying "abide in my love," but none feel like a perfect fit. When we aren't sure what the intended meaning in English is, it is best to go to the source, in this case, the original language of the Gospel Greek. The word that is translated to abide in English, is "Meno" in Greek. This word is defined as "to remain, or stay, or continue." It is the same word used earlier in John when some disciples ask Jesus "Where are you staying?" So, verse 9 in today's passage is a command from Jesus, "Stay in my love, remain in my love, continue in my love." We are to linger in Jesus's love for us, making that our starting point for all we do. What does that look like in practice? Well, Jesus continues giving us a bit more detail, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love." Love and obedience to Jesus's commands are intertwined. Though this sounds like a simple message, when we move past how nice it sounds in theory and go to live that out, the complexity and grand scale of that

instruction comes out. It can feel a bit intimidating, this command to live out love in the same ways and to the same level as Jesus did.

To give a little bit of context to this conversation, this passage is part of what is called the “Farewell discourse” to the Disciples the night before he knows he will be crucified. This is Jesus’s goodbye speech before he will be killed and before everything gets shaken up around the Disciples. This speech is not just a goodbye, but Jesus’s final pieces of wisdom he wants them to hold onto, as well as encouragement to sustain them through the tough days ahead. The Disciples, this rag tag group of young fishermen and curious women, sit around Jesus. They sit in the upper room in the capitol city that is the seat of the government and faith leaders who are most against Jesus and his movement. They are surely on edge. Now, here is Jesus, in the midst of all these tensions and fears, telling them to love everyone and act out of love over everything else. This would be intimidating and probably a bit nerve-wracking. But Jesus knows. In this moment after Jesus shares his high expectations of his followers, Jesus follows it with the reminder that he shares these teachings to complete their joy and bring his joy into their hearts. This is not to be an intimidating, speech to instill, but a reminder that with Jesus we are loved and share that love, and living that life should be a joyful thing.

Jesus is quite thorough in this goodbye speech, making his intention clear. Abide in Jesus’s love, do that by being obedient to his commands, and don’t forget this is his main commandment: “love one another as I have loved you.” And that love looks like laying down our lives for our friends, or being willing to sacrifice our wants, desires and comforts for others. This is to be the foundation of our faith and our life: God loves us, we share in God’s love and bring it to abide or remain in us by loving one another. Though Jesus shares with us of a love lived out through action, this founding commandment also emphasizes the relational nature of God and our faith. God is not a removed deity dictating our individual lives from afar. No, our God is one who so loves us and wants to be near us that God became human in sending the Son to dwell among us. Jesus revealed to us God’s abundant love for all and also shared ways for us to feel God’s abundant love and share in it. How do we abide in God’s love? We love one another. God’s love comes to exist among us through the interlacing love of the Christian community. We can love God on our own, sure, but to truly abide--remain--in God’s love, we must share love with others.

Jesus makes the relational nature of his message clear as he continues in verse 14-15, “14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 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.” It is easy these days to think of the term friend as a trivial or casual term to call another, like calling someone a buddy. We toss around the word friend a lot, there are a lot of people who you may call a friend, but are they truly? I mean, I have something like 1,500 “Friends” on Facebook! So, sure, yeah, we are “friends” Jesus. It is easy in our context to take Jesus’s declaration for granted. But this declaration calling the Disciples, and subsequently those of us reading now, friends, is no flippant remark. This was and is a revolutionary claim, Jesus, who is God, GOD,

calls us friend! True friends, those who really live into the true meaning of the word, are important people in our lives that we have a deep abiding connection with. For some, friendships become more important than family ties as they create a “chosen family.” It is this kind of relationship that God does not just want with us, but already claims toward us. // Much of what Jesus teaches to his Disciples compares to the practices in the world and shares a better way of living with God. As Jesus says he does not call us servants, but friends, there seems to be an underlying comparison. Though the it is not explicitly made here in John 15, we can read between the lines. This is a shift from an hierarchical type of relationship to one of mutuality. You know that weird feeling when you are invited to call a teacher or professor by their first name for the first time? I can remember my first weeks in college how awkward I felt calling a professor by their first name even though they told us to do so. Or did you have a moment when you became an adult that those that you always called by Mr. or Mrs. or Miss and their last name now invite you to call them by their first name? One of my friends that I have known since 2nd grade is still one of my good friends and her mom is close with mine as well. I see my friend and her mom most often these days at Clergy camp where they have continued on as programming staff. Among that group, my friend’s mom is a peer, a fellow camp staff person, and everyone there knows her as Karen. I started talking about her as Karen with other staff there. It still feels funny whenever I use her first name, but it is where our relationship is at this point, closer to peers than adult with authority and young child. I imagine it is this unsettled feeling that the Disciples are feeling as Jesus completely redefines what the relationship between him and God’s people looks like. There is no longer the hierarchy of servant to master, but friends living and working the same goals.

To continue the comparison and take it a little farther: You know who doesn’t have friends? Caesar. An emperor does not and cannot have friends because he only has subordinates. An emperor is at the tippy top of a completely hierarchical system, he has no peers and no one can truly be a friend. All those below an emperor are servants. Jesus is sharing that relationship with God is not like that. In Jesus coming to be among us and sharing the heart of God with us, God demolished the barriers between us and God. Yes, God has authority over us, but in the things that matter most, which these last weeks have drilled into us is love, we are equal participants as God. We have a reciprocal relationship with God, a friendship of giving and taking, a friendship of relying and trusting in each other. And we are called to have that kind of equal, non-hierarchical relationship with each other. With love as our foundation and loving others being what we are obedient to, we are to share in a community without hierarchy, without subjugation (or master and servant relationships), or coercion (using love as a way to hold power over another).

Recap: We are loved by Jesus and are called to abide in that love, which we do by keeping Jesus’s commandments, which is primarily focused on loving one another as Jesus loves us. Though this is a big and nebulous task, it is one that Jesus promises will bring complete joy to our lives. When we live into that mutual accepting and giving of love between us and God and others then we are fully living into what it means to be a friend of Jesus. Jesus closes out this part of his instructions with the final hook to bring us to join in on this commandment. This message to be loved, be love, and give

love could still feel optional or conditional to those who are so entrenched in the ways of the world and those like Caesar. Jesus originally gave this speech to his Disciples that were about to face a whole lot and the challenge of their work would be increasing a LOT. Jesus knew that they were likely already or about to start questioning if they were worthy for the task of doing Jesus's ministry, of being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. I know that plenty, if not all of us, have probably had that doubt at some point too. Am I really capable of living and sharing love like Jesus describes here? To this Jesus cuts to the chase, "You did not choose me but I chose you." Before we can even recognize the invitation, Jesus has already chosen us to be part of God's love and part of loving one another. As we are right now, Jesus chooses us and invites us into friendship with God. Jesus chooses us as we are now, imperfections and all, to start living out this way of life founded on love. Are we going to be perfect at it right away? NO! Let's remember who Jesus was talking to in the upper room: Peter who would deny Jesus 3 times in the next 24 hours, Judas who has already betrayed Jesus to the government, Thomas who would doubt the resurrection of Jesus until he could see it himself. These are just three of the immediate imperfections in that moment. Jesus is affirming the love that Peter, Judas, Thomas, and the rest of the imperfect Disciples already have and can live out as they are. Jesus knows they will make mistakes, they will not get everything right, but they have fruits to contribute to the ministry of God. Jesus is reminding them that God loves them first and there is nothing they can do about it. Jesus calls each of us to be part of this mutual relationship with God and the body of Christ. This call is also a bit of a challenge: God loves you just as you are now and calls you to go do your best to love one another, you have been chosen for this. So, if we don't love one another, if we are not bearing fruit of love shared and cultivated in others, then we are explicitly rejecting the calling that Jesus has chosen for each of us.

This passage gives us a lot of assurance and instruction on how to live our life with God. Jesus assures us that perfection is not expected right now and that living into this call should bring about Joy. But, this is also a serious reminder to his Disciples, in that upper room through today, that love has to be the foundation of our lives and that is not some frilly idea. Love here means loving one another not just when it is convenient or easy. Not just when it comes naturally or to those who we already like. Loving like Jesus loves us means serving and sacrifice. Love means accepting discomfort for the betterment of another. Love means setting aside the assumptions and conclusions about others that keep us from seeing others truly as equals, as friends. Laying down our life like Jesus suggested does not just have to mean being willing to die for someone else. It means setting aside our own privileges, our own creature comforts, our own pride to help others. It means being willing to change the way we live our life to better share love with others. To fully live out the love that Jesus shares with us we must strive to be people and a community that lives as Jesus does, without barriers as equals with friendship extended to any kind of person. It is when we live out that call that we will collectively bear fruit that will last. Let us all abide in that love, the love of God and accept Jesus's command to do all we can to love one another.

Prayer of Confession (John 15)

Jesus, friend and brother,  
you taught us to abide in your generous love,  
for it completes our lives and gives us joy;  
you ask us to love others as you have loved us,  
for it brings your creation to fruition.  
We sometimes struggle  
to love the people in our lives  
as you have loved us.  
Forgive us, we pray,  
and teach us your love again. Amen.

Words of Assurance (John 15:15b-16a)  
Long ago Jesus said to his disciples,  
“I have called you friends, because I have made  
known to you everything that I have heard from [God].  
You did not choose me, but I chose you!”  
Jesus speaks these words to us today.  
Jesus forgives us and chooses us to be his friends,  
sharing his great work of love. Hallelujah!