

Address: May 17, 2009 - Averyt Hall
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John 15: 9-17

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last Sunday Dean Linder talked about the path God wants us to take, and our faith under such circumstances. This week we look to both John's gospel and his first epistle. A very logical and methodical man, John passes on a message that seems to answer too many questions. A message that can be classified as either too easy to realize, or construed into an endeavor too difficult to answer.

Do you ever look through your pantry for that box of fruit roll-ups for two to three minutes? Then you have to resort to calling your 5 year old brother into the kitchen to find them. And he'll walk right up and show you the box. I believe the term is, "If it were a snake it would've bit you." The Christian faith from the outside is too compounded and made far more complex than it should be. People can be scared away by the political ties or all of the text and prayers that are declared and re-declared. But this overshadows Jesus's simple truth, without any mitigating circumstances, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."

How then, has Jesus loved us? While the English language contains only one word for love, Greek culture had four different words. *Storge*, the affectionate kind of love; *philia*, for brotherly love; *eros*, where one is "in love"; and *agape*, which is associated with the love from a God or a sacrificial love. One of Jesus' more famous acts of love occurred as he was crucified, when he appealed to the Father, saying, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) This instance is Agape, or Godly love, as Jesus was not compelled to love more those crying for him, or hindered in his love by wanting to love those less that were yelling at him, just the same love. In our gospel passage today, Jesus declares to his disciples, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Jesus used the Philia love, or brotherly love, because the relationships between the disciples and Christ may have been more brotherly. How then should we look to love our neighbor, and in effect set up our life, in the way that Christ does? We could probably go through the entire book of John, or all of the gospels, and tally the number of Agape against the number of Philia, to find if we should love brotherly or Godly. Or we could settle for somewhere in the middle.

Jesus exercised both Agape love and Philia love on earth, so there should not be a need to discriminate his love into one of those two categories. From this, we must love Godly, by working to respect others without influence of benefits or detriment, and we also must love brotherly, by opening friendships and enjoying the happiness that is united with the company of another. So how do we serve God in this way, by earnestly loving our neighbors?

We should think to love through prayer, but at times that seems flawed, as we probably cannot offer an intelligent prayer for every member of our church, let alone every member of the human race. What about in the presence of anger, hatred or inflicted pain? God commands us to love, but that is certainly not our first reaction. For instance, say a Lexus cuts you off while you're driving down Gervais. You have three options. The first is grace, where you ask God for patience, forgive the Lexus, and forget about it. The second is mercy where you tailgate the car for the next few blocks without committing any physical harm. And the last is justice, where you reach into your personal stash of golf balls kept for this exact situation. You speed up in front of the Lexus, toss a golf ball out of the sun roof and make sure the ball cracks the other car's windshield, while flashing a cruel hand signal out of your window. As you may know Jesus commands us to choose the mercy option and love the Lexus.

"This is my commandment." Not this is my request, or this is my suggestion. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you." From a faith and philosophical standpoint, it is our responsibility to love others without a second thought.

Even more than our ethics or responsibilities, I, myself, need a concrete reason or incentive to love. Today was a unique day, as all of the previous readings of Jesus explain that when we follow him and his commandments, we are disciples of Christ, and we receive the love of God the Father. In today's gospel passage, there is a slightly different message as Jesus proclaims, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Once we learn to love as he did, we graduate, "Henceforth I call you not servants; but I have called you friends." We grow in our friendship with Christ as we grow through the friendships we build on this earth.

The disciples were the Christian church in utero, and John's Gospel shows the anticipation for such a new creation, with the love from the Father passed on to the Son, the love from Jesus passed to his disciples, and the disciples to the world. Agape and Philia. Amen.