

Remain in the Love that Lasts

✠ Joyfully treasuring Christ's commands (vv.9-11)

✠ Loving each other like Christ (vv.12,13)

✠ Living fruitful lives as chosen friends (vv.14-17)

In the name of Jesus, our loving Savior, dearly redeemed friends of God:

One of the scariest things about “love – American style” is the wedding vows. Some couples who can't abide wedding promises based on God's Word, such as we have in our hymnal, like to write their own. The phrase that sticks out like a sore thumb in amateur wedding vows is the promise to stay married “as long as we both shall love.” God judged that kind of “love” among His ancient Israelites when He said, “*Your love is like the morning mist.*” (Hosea 6:4) No matter how you try to picture it on the silver screen, such “love” always blows away in the heat of the sun. Bright prosperity makes it worse. American divorce rates increase with each remarriage, from 50-75-90% on third-time marriages. We look for “love” in all the wrong places and just can't find it in our sinful hearts.

Although learning Jesus' lessons on **Love** from this text will help every relationship including marriage, our loving Savior is talking about something much wider, far higher and way deeper. It's worth our time to give our Lord undivided attention while He tells us how to **Remain in the Love that Lasts**. No morning mist to blow away here. Such priceless **Love** as this remains forever when we're...

✠ Joyfully treasuring Christ's commands (vv.9-11)

Commands and obedience don't invoke much joy especially for Americans. In fact, you may remember the stories of German POW's right here in Minnesota. As World War II raged on in Europe, many German soldiers became disillusioned with stories of atrocities by Hitler's Third Reich. Their only recourse was to surrender to the Allies and take their chances as prisoners of war. Obedience to Hitler held no joy, but only shame for those who lived in the fear of the Lord. It's axiomatic that a general cannot hold his troops with only fear. The most famous of conquerors, Alexander the Great, captivated the hearts of his men, not with fear, but with love and admiration that drove them on unprecedented campaigns to the ends of the earth. But as soon as he was gone, Alexander's empire fell apart.

So it's troubling in our modern English Bibles trying to translate Jesus' words in these dear chapters of John 14-17. The Lover of our souls is about to prove His love by substituting Himself on our cross. Yet in spite of bitter suffering, our Savior's entire focus is on the will of the Father to save wretched sinners like us. We constantly love ourselves and neglect our neighbor. Some of the most painful victims of our selfishness live in our own homes where love ought to be the sun in the morning and the moon at night. Instead it's a mist that blows away in sunshine and storm. Then this translation? “*If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love,*” misses the heart of willing obedience. What we have in the original Greek is the Holy Spirit's word *threw*, which I believe transliterates into our English word “treasure.” The old King James Version of 1611 translates “keep,” but in the sense of *guarding* someone or something precious like a treasure. Especially in Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in John 17, no one would think that Jesus is *obeying* us, nor would Jesus pray for the Father to *obey* us. From that chapter it's clear that *threw*-“keep” means to *guard*, or *keep safe* (NIV) *from harm and danger*.

Can you see the difference in this battle zone where the war rages for our eternal souls? Shall we “obey” Christ's commands in slavish fear *to do – or else?* That's never been what God wanted since the Garden of Eden or the law God gave through Moses at Mount Sinai. Hear Jesus' words more explicitly: “*Just as the Father has unconditionally loved me, so also I have loved you with my self-sacrificing love.*”

Remain in the love which is mine. If you guard and keep the commands of mine, in the love of mine you will remain just as I have treasured the commands of my Father and I remain in His unconditional love. These things I have begun saying to you in order that the joy which is mine may remain in you and to make your joy overflow.” Joyfully treasuring Christ’s commands grabs our hearts for...

✠ **Loving each other like Christ (vv.12,13)**

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” You would almost need to be a combat veteran to really understand this, or at least have the rare experience where someone kindly gave a kidney and then died in order to save your life. One of my favorite stories is about a boy who agreed to donate blood for his little sister who was deathly ill. He was sad but very determined as the medical team drew his blood. Afterwards when his sister was doing better, he still had a question for the doctor: “Will I die right away or will it take a while?” He thought they had taken all his blood, that very soon his own heart would stop beating. That little boy was willing to die in order to save his sister’s life – Christ’s **Love that Lasts**.

“No greater love...than this” really only fits Jesus. He truly is the Friend who keeps coming in when everyone else is going out. Knowing us better than we know ourselves, He truly loves us just as we are, but loves us too much to leave us that way. So when He who is perfect and holy, loves us sinners so much that He calls us His “friends,” we really need to listen when He commands, **“Love each other as I have loved you.”** Many of you probably already guessed that the Greek word for “love” here is that uniquely Biblical word *agaph*, *self-sacrificing, unconditional love* only seen clearly in Christ.

How does this Christ-like *agaph*-“love” show in us husbands directly commanded by God to **“love [our] wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”?** (Ephesians 5:25) Wives and mothers may think “love” comes naturally for them until they get sick, tired and crabby – not just with their husbands and children, but with their fellow sisters in Christ who don’t always see things their way. How often do our women at New Life need to be reminded of Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians? **“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, Syzygus, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel....”** (4:2f)

✠ **Living fruitful lives as chosen friends (vv.14-17)**

Bearing with one another in love is just one of the beautiful fruits of faith that our Lord is growing in us by this powerful Word of grace. Yes, He wants us to *guard* and *treasure* His Word, but not like hypocrites who talk a good line then fall to backbiting and bickering in our hearts. **“You are my friends,”** Jesus says, **“if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”** Americans are flocking to theaters to suck up the *Da Vinci Code* that Tom Hanks thinks is a good piece of work. “Why of course!” they say, “It’s fiction,” but it’s meant to sow seeds of doubt on the Bible by sinners who never will believe God’s Word. But the Bible says, **“Test everything.”** (1 Thessalonians 5:21) Jesus came down from heaven as the Truth straight from God. Where else could you find such **Love that Lasts** for all eternity than from the heart of God our heavenly Father?

But lest anyone get the big head that God would be so good to him, Jesus sets the record straight: **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”** Whether your parents brought you as a baby to Baptism, or a Christian knocked on your door, God did the choosing. He brought us here, and God alone gets the glory for the produce of the **Love that Lasts**: **“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”** (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV) Faith-born **Love** is like a fruit tree bearing bumper crops of goodness from God lasting long after life on earth is done. And one fruit of faith is God’s gift of powerful prayer. Jesus says, **“Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love**

each other.” Good nutrition in Word and sacrament plus lots of practice gives us another reason to thank God for this new day of grace. It’s another opportunity to practice **the Love that Lasts**. Amen.