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[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2015&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-26704d)] 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.

This is the gospel of Christ,

Please be seated.

Jesus directed his disciples to “love one another as I have loved you”. Indeed, the passage begins and ends with this message. The message is quite clear, to be a friend of Jesus means to keep his commandments and love as he has loved. While modern conversation about love can veer toward the cozy and sentimental, Jesus issued a radical call, perhaps the most radical message in the Gospel. His words indicated that the kind of love that Jesus spoke of was intended to be reproduced by his followers. This is love that goes all the way. It gives all things, hopes all things and endures all things.

It does not necessarily go looking to the extreme of losing one’s life, but sometimes, if that is what love requires, for example defending for the love of one’s family or even our country in dark times, that love would not usually falter. This love in action is not unique to Jesus but is to be a characteristic of all Jesus’ friends, including us.

Often when we think of friendship with Christ, we focus on how good a friend Jesus is to us, and today we sang “What a friend we have in Jesus.” Friendship is an all too scarce commodity in our world. Competiveness, a mobile society, a fragmentation of life, all tend to isolate people and make the traditional patterns of making and sustaining friends difficult. Unfortunately, the term friend is often reduced to acquaintance, and the ingredients of a deep relationship, such as empathy, support, and mutual struggle are lost. These things take time and effort.

Indeed, friendship is one of life’s greatest gifts. Enduring friendships are places where we practise patience, forgiveness, kindness and justice. In practice, we learn hospitality, mercy, generosity and compassion. To be sure, not all friendship can achieve such lofty goals, but is often through love that we catch glimpses of what it means to radiate the goodness and love of God.

When it comes to living faithfully in today’s world, Christianity focuses on words like love, but also justice, peace forgiveness wholeness and self-control. Into this reality, John places friendship at the centre of what it means to live faithfully. Jesus calls us friends, not servants. He states that he chose us, not the other way around, and as his friends, we are asked to go and bear lasting fruit of his love for us.

We might wonder what Jesus was thinking when he chose his very ordinary group of disciples. And yet, the growth of the first-century church shows that Jesus chose well, and that he empowered well. These disciples did great things, not because they were great, but because the one who empowered them was great.

There is an important lesson here. God chooses whom God chooses. God empowers whom God empowers. Most Godly work is done by ordinary people distinguished by only one characteristic—they have given God their heart. That should encourage us. It should also make us hesitant to judge any person’s potential. The star athlete or celebrity can be too full of self-importance to be much heavenly good, but the person who seems to have the least to offer might just be the person that God chooses to transform the world. God chooses whom God chooses.

If we are to produce fruit for Christ, it is important that we seek his will for our lives—to let him direct our appointment. The humblest Sunday school teacher, serving whole-heartedly in a Christ-given appointment, can render just as important a service to our community as any Priest, Arch Deacon or Bishop. Christ often uses very humble people to change the world.

Jesus talked of fruit that will last. Some people are called to produce reports that will be good for a few weeks—others to build cars that will last for a few years, (well hopefully)—still others to build houses that will last for a few decades. Christ appoints disciples to bear fruit that will last for centuries—for eternity—forever.

Here we have intertwined elements that feed each other. The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves us and invites us to abide in his love. As we keep his commandments, we abide in his love, and we can experience a complete kind of joy. This joy should fill our hearts, driving out poisonous feelings that would otherwise make it difficult to love the hard to love. Knowing that this neighbour is a child of our Father and is therefore our brother or sister may be challenging but also helps us to love. John also wanted us to make sure that we do not forget to take our Christ-inspired love to church. We are to have compassion for our friends in faith.

That challenge is to love the near at hand, perhaps as near as the Christian beside us in worship, who may not be the first person we are drawn to.

Yes, to be a friend of Jesus means to keep his commandments and to love as he has loved. This Gospel speaks of love as a commandment, an idea that may seem a bit strange. The usual definition of love is not one that is conjured up under pressure or duress. To be genuine, love must be spontaneous and to come from within, and not without.

The love that Jesus commands is more a “doing” than a “feeling” word where we act to demonstrate our love in some practical fashion. We are to do what is possible to feed the hungry—and to give drink to the thirsty—and to welcome the stranger—and to clothe the naked. This love has little or nothing of personal gain or glory when helping these people. This understanding of love is quite different from that of our culture—a culture that too often understands love as the satisfaction of one’s own needs rather than as satisfying the needs of the other.

But the thrust of Jesus’ love is giving, not getting. Consequently, God’s love, Jesus’ love, our love, our abiding in Christ, and our keeping of the commandments change us in ways that enable us to love those we see as the imperfect souls with whom we rub elbows every day—to love them warts and all—because, goodness me, they may be loving us, that is us, the equally imperfect!

Amen