

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

In our Gospel today Jesus continues the discourse He had begun about Himself as the True Vine and us as the branches. It's actually part of a larger discourse called the Farewell Discourse. It shouldn't surprise you that some of the same themes are evident here, too, like abiding, and bearing fruit, and love. Abide as branches in me, Jesus said, and you'll bear much fruit. Love is part of that fruit.

But there are some differences, and these differences begin to explain what it means to abide in Jesus. To abide in Jesus is to abide in His love, and Jesus' love is the love that He received from the Father. It's the love that had the Father give His only Son to the world, being born humbly in "*the likeness of men*" (Phil. 2:7), the Creator becoming creature. It's the love for a Son who obeyed His Father's will, submitting to the baptism of John, fulfilling all righteousness on behalf of those He came to redeem. It's a love that the Father proclaimed from heaven: "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*" (Mark 1:11). It's the love that sent this "*beloved Son*" to the gallows and the obedience of "*death on a cross*" (Phil. 2:8).

This is the kind of love in which Christ's disciples are to abide — in faith — His love manifested in us as we seek to obey Jesus' command to love, not that this love could come close to the quality of the Father's love for Jesus and His perfect obedience, but they are of the same kind.

This kind of love is called ἀγάπη. It's something that is outward looking, "a giving, active love on the other's behalf." This kind of love "is almost completely lacking in pre-biblical Greek." But we find this kind of love all over the New Testament, and especially in the evangelist John and his epistles.

This biblical love does things for others. Of course, it all begins with God, as we heard last week: "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8) and "*love is from God*" (1 John 4:7). "*We love because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). Again in the Gospel, we hear that this love begins with the Father: "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you,*" and so are we called to love.

Martin Luther expresses the Father's outward-looking, self-choosing love so well in the hymn we just sang. "But God had seen my wretched state Before the world's foundation, And mindful of His mercies great, He planned for my salvation. He turned to me a father's heart; He did not choose the easy part But gave His dearest treasure" (LSB556:4).

Yes, the Father's love for His fallen creation extends back to before the world was made, before Christ inhabited the womb of His virgin mother. He expressed it before the foundation of the world in choosing to send His own Son as the Christ,

the One who would crush the serpent's head, the One who would redeem fallen mankind by His blood, the One who would restore the perfection of paradise to us.

This is love expressed in action: the Father said to His beloved Son, "It's time to have compassion" — it's time to put that love into action. "Then go, bright jewel of My crown" — there's the action; that's how God loved the world. He gave His own Son to be lifted up on a cross — "And bring to all salvation." "From sin and sorrow set them free; Slay bitter death for them that they May live with You forever." (LSB556:5).

This is how the Son abided in the Father's love — "The Son obeyed His Father's will" (LSB556:6). He willingly did what the Father commanded and gave Him authority to do. He laid down His life for us. No one took His life from Him — He laid it down of His own accord (John 10:18). We hear it in the loud voice by which He proclaimed, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). Having accomplished all for our salvation, Jesus breathed out the Spirit and died. This is Jesus' love for us in action.

And it's a greater love than anything on earth. It's a Divine love. Next Sunday, Mother's Day is celebrated around the world. We know and rightly praise a mother's love that will sacrifice for her child. A bit later this month, we remember fallen soldiers, who selflessly gave up their lives in service to their country. They deserve our accolades, but neither of these is sufficient to understand the Son's expression of love for us.

We understand risking one's life for her children or for one's country — the good things we love. But we are not good. There is "*none [who] is righteous, no, not one ... All have turned aside; together they have become worthless*" (Rom. 3:10, 12). Our "*mind[s] [are] set on the flesh.*" They are "*hostile to God*" — enemies. They do "*not submit to God's law ... [they] cannot.*" We do not, we cannot "*please God*" (Rom. 8:7-8).

Yet, Jesus called us friends when we were still enemies. Indeed, He made friendship possible. "*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8). That's what this verse is all about: "*Greater love has no one than that He lay down His life for His friends.*" In fact, He reckons us so, as we in faith gladly seek to love as Christ loved, to obey as Christ obeyed. "What I on earth have done and taught Guide all your life and teaching; So shall the kingdom's work be wrought And honored in your preaching" (LSB556:10).

What a wonderful exchange — for us. Jesus condescends from His exalted position as the sinless Son of God in order to call us friends, while we are lifted up from our lowly status as slaves and are reckoned friends. And it's not by our own

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Pastor Douglas Punke

doing — it's all a gift from the Father's love expressed through His Son. Abide in My love, Jesus says, and His joy will be in us, a joy that will be full.

Yes, let us rejoice in Jesus' love. Rejoice that we have been born of God by water and the word. Rejoice that He has brought us to faith in Him by the Spirit and the water and the blood that bear witness to Him. Rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins, eternal life, and salvation. Rejoice that Jesus has chosen us and appointed us to bear the fruit of love also to one another. Rejoice that He, who attached us to His Son as branches to the Vine by Word and Sacraments, gives us all that we need for this faith, for love, and for hope. Let us rejoice and be glad in these ...

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.