

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Last Sunday, I talked about love. How difficult is it? Difficult indeed. This Sunday, Jesus and the Apostle and the Church are not done with it. As a word, it stands out in our texts today, too.

Love is an important theme throughout the Scriptures—Jesus says, “*all the Law and the Prophets*” depend on the commandments to love God and love neighbor (Matt. 22:37-39). Remember how St. Paul teaches, “*Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ... love is the fulfilling of the law*” (Rom. 13:8, 10). That doesn't make it bad. No, St. Paul also says, “*the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good*” (Rom. 7:12). Love is good. It's very much a Christian thing.

Christian love implies will and action. Love does something. We all recognize the truth of Jesus' statement in our Gospel: “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*” We marvel at examples of this kind of love: the one who sacrifices his life for his family, the soldier who sacrifices his life for his comrade. Humanly speaking, this truly is a great love.

And this is Jesus' love for you, for before love is a Christian thing, it is a Christ thing. And His is much more, and it begins before the cross. For before He could lay down His life for you, He had to become like you, a mortal, a man able to die. The writer to the Hebrews says it like this: “*he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might ... make propitiation for the sins of the people*” (Heb. 2:17).

And this is what we sang about in the hymn we just sang: “God said to His beloved Son: ‘It's time to have compassion. Then go, bright jewel of My crown, And bring to all salvation. From sin and sorrow set them free; Slay bitter death for them that they May live with You forever.’”

“The Son obeyed His Father's will, Was born of virgin mother; And God's good pleasure to fulfill, He came to be my brother. His royal pow'r disguised He bore; A servant's form, like mine, He wore To lead the devil captive” (LSB556:5, 6).

For you see, in Jesus, God was loving us before there was anything loveable in us, and Jesus was already calling us friends, even before He trod the painful path to the cross. But He called us friends so that He might perform this greatest act of love for the world. Love is a Christ thing.

Yes, He called us friends even though our love for the Father was not manifest, though our love for His word is incomplete at best, though our love for keeping His commandments displays utter failure, though, our love for one another is too often absent.

We are sinners — poor and miserable. Why should Jesus call us friends? We don't deserve it, but He does. Why should God love us? We don't deserve that, either. But He does — while we are sinners. St. Paul says it this way, *“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom. 5:8). Greater love has no man! And again he says, *“if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life”* (Rom. 5:10). Greater love has no man! Love is a Christ thing.

And so we sang on: “Though he will shed My precious blood, Me of My life bereaving, All this I suffer for your good; Be steadfast and believing. Life will from death the vict'ry win; My innocence shall bear your sin, And you are blest forever” (LSB556:8).

This is Jesus' love for us, not motivated by our friendship with Him but motivated out of His Divine love for us. There's the order, as St. John tells us a bit earlier in his epistle: *“he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). He took us enemies and calls us friends. He took us slaves to sin, and gives us freedom from sin's consequences. He loved us first, and then in freedom as Jesus' friends, we love. We seek to do Jesus' will—to keep His commandment—*“love one another.”*

For love is also a Christian thing, for it all flows out of Christ. Our love for others flows out of Jesus' love for us. And Jesus' love for us flows from His cross, and from that cross out of his mouth—Spirit—from that cross out of His pierced side—water and blood. His love gives birth to us as His children, born of God in Holy Baptism—water, abiding in Him and in His love as we abide in His word—Spirit—and as we eat of His Sacrament—blood. These things that poured out of Jesus on the cross generate faith, and by these given to us today in the Word and Sacraments, we bear fruit, the Spirit's fruit of love. *“I chose you,”* Jesus said—called you, justified you, glorified you (Rom. 8:30)— *“and [I] appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.”*

It's a Christian thing, for remember, we have Christ's command, *“love one another as I have loved you,”* and we know, *“faith without works is dead”* (James 2:17). Love is not optional. Christ's church shows compassion to people at home and around the world as the very hand of Christ reaching out to those in need. This work is the very expression of our faith in the world.

Love is a Christian thing. *“Little children, let us love not in word or talk alone, but in deed and in truth”* (1 John 3:18). Again, *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God”* (1 John 4:7). That was John. And the writer to the Hebrews says: *“let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works”* (Heb. 10:24). Or again, *“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing*

to God” (Heb. 13:16). And, of course, we have Jesus’ own words, “*These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*”

Love is a Christian thing, and our whole Western Civilization is a byproduct of the Christian influence, on law, government, economics, the arts, science, schools, hospitals, hospice care, care for the mentally ill. I talked about this a couple weeks ago, and noted how Christ is the cause. The resurrection made all the difference.

Love is a Christian thing in big ways with churchly agencies—some local, some Synod wide, and it's a Christian thing in our everyday lives, as we go about our lives serving in the various callings that the Lord has put us: husband, wife, father, mother, children, workers, employers, etc. Christian love can be a simple thing; it doesn't have to be grandiose: it can be a smile to a friend, a kind word to a stranger, a helping hand to a neighbor, assisting your classmate through a tough assignment. What it can't be is non-existent—not and be a Christian, for love is a Christian thing.

Love is an important word in the Scriptures. Of course, it is. “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8). Love is also a Christ thing, Jesus calling us friends and laying down His life for us. Trust in this love for your salvation. Then come, eat and drink the fruit of Christ's love in the Holy Supper provided here today. Thus strengthened in faith in Jesus, may you be strengthened also in fervent love for one another. As Jesus' friends, let us seek to love one another as He commanded. It's what Christians do. They bear fruit—love. It's a Christian thing.

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