

John 15:9-17
“The Love of Separation”
Sunday May 9th, 2021 “Mother’s Day”

“The Love of Separation”. What does that mean? Does it mean loving to separate people and sowing division and discord? Does it sound like our modern political scene in America? “To love separation” seems more demonic than good.

“The Love of Separation”. Does it mean the feelings of extreme introverts in the comic strip “Dilbert” who love this time of the pandemic where they do not have to relate face-to-face with anyone, with the masks, the sheltering in place, and working from home?

“The Love of Separation”. Does it mean at times we express our love by separation? In this time of the pandemic does it mean we express our love by the masks, the social distancing, the isolation, and working from home?

The Bible’s view of division/separation is not very positive. Separation if it does happen is just for a time like the Christ, the 2nd Person of the Trinity coming to earth and living among us.

But to name a few examples of the condemnation of division in the Bible I begin with Jude 1:19, “It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions.” And Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10, “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.”

The Bible speaks of the importance of unity within the family and within the Family of the Church, the body of Christ. But even Jesus by his words causes divisions. He said it would be that way. Luke 12:51, Jesus said, “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” The division Jesus brought and brings today is that we must choose. Are we going to follow Jesus or are we going to follow the world?

The verses from John that we are exploring today are a continuation of last week's passage which stresses the unity of relationship with God through Jesus "The true vine" and unity with each other thru Jesus. Last week the scriptures spoke of how to abide in Jesus. Now "abide" means not only "sabbath and rest" but also to "remain or stay" in relationship.

As verses 9 and 10 say, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide/remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide/remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide/remain in his love."

And what is the purpose of remaining in Jesus' love? It is to receive joy, complete fulfilling joy. As Jesus said in verse 11, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

Last week we explored 4 ways of abiding/remaining in Jesus: Scripture, Prayer, Recommitment and Fellowship. This week Jesus adds a 5th "obedience". Jesus "commands us to love one another." Verse 12 says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Think about this, if loving one another was so easy why would Jesus have to command us to do it?

Yup, some of us are a little difficult to get a long with. Some might be described as old, opinionated curmudgeons. Not exactly someone to like, but someone we are commanded by Jesus... to love! Yes, Love is not easy if Jesus had to command it.

You see in the end, the love that Jesus speaks of here is not the love of transient feelings, the fluff of Valentine's Day and even Mother's Day. The love Jesus speaks of here is the love that is there when your child says, "I hate you!" It is the love that is there when your child has kept you up at night for 6 months in a row with the croup, or diarrhea. Yes, love is a commitment.

That is why we make vows at our weddings. Love ain't easy. Love is a commitment as the traditional wedding vows remind us. These vows that

have been used in the Christian church for over a 1000 years say, “For better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health.” It is the commitment to these vows that carry us through the worse, the poorer, the sickness. Those who have been married many years could write in things they have experienced through the commitment of Love that are not so very happy, but the endurance through them “has established your homes in love and peace.” Which is the promise of fulfilling the vows.

When I was a youth Pastor, I had what I called our youth groups “10 Commandments”, one of which was, “You had to love everyone not like everyone”. Love is a commitment for another person’s best interests. The interesting thing is that as we commit to another, we act in love and through that we can find joy in the relationship.

Within the Body of Christ, the Church we need to do the same. We need to acknowledge another’s flaws, most importantly see our own, and offer forgiveness and love and above all remain, abide in the relationships. And yes, my friends, who have walked long with Jesus and been involved in and committed to the Church, you know, it ain’t easy!

But “The Love of Separation” can be good. Separation can be a good. The social distancing, the sheltering in place, the masks, the temperature checks, the waivers and all the things that now separate us, are good in their time and place. We have separated for our own good and the good of others.

And those who have been attending here despite the gauntlet of Temperature taking, Covid questions, the waivers that now are gone, sanitizing our hands, in one door and out the other, sitting separated, wearing masks, I admire your tenacity, your faith in action your commitment to abide/remain with one another and with God!!!

My mom in the last 6 months of her life was isolated and separated from me and the rest of our family in her assisted living facility. It was for her own protection for this Virus’ toll is heaviest on the oldest. I saw her for the first time in 6 months the day before she died right after she had a

stroke, that eventually took her life. She was separated from us out of love out of our love for her, but death, death found her anyway.

My mom taught me that some separation is good. My mom was married to my dad for 63 years. She had a previous marriage before my dad that lasted for 5 years that ended in divorce. She had married an unrepentant alcoholic to stay out of a very unhappy home. I never knew her first married name until a few years before her death. She never spoke of the guy. But when she did speak of the divorce this was what she told me.

When she was in her late 20s, she spoke with a Christian Counselor who quoted this verse to her from 1 Corinthians 7:15, **“But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.”** She often would speak of how **“God calls us to peace.”** Nothing more, and I did not fully understand this until she was gone. God calls us to peace.

Our denomination seems to be headed in the direction of separation. Maybe the 40+ years of fighting over LGBTQ is coming to an end. This past week the Wesleyan Covenant Association had a global gathering. In it they endorsed the “Protocol of Separation” along with the start of a “Global Methodist Church”. It looks like there will soon be 86 denominations that have grown out of the Wesleyan movement come next year’s General Conference.

God calls us to peace in our marriages, in our families, in our churches and in our Denomination. As Jesus said, **“Peace I give to you not as the world gives.”** Sometimes as parents we have had to send our children to their separate rooms for the peace of the family.

Well today is Mother’s Day. Mother’s more than men I believe know the love of separation, and the pain of separation. We begin our lives as one with them in their bodies. Mother’s experience the pain of separation on birth, and then through out a child’s life they experience the love of separation and the joy of separation as they release their children to first go to school, then college or work, marriage and other life events that separate and yet grant life to the child. The separation is always done out of love.

Yes, love is not easy. Jesus had to command it. But when we obey his commands, we find love, we live in love, and we are enabled to love.

And as we obey Jesus and live in his love, we are declared his friend. Jesus said, **“I do not call you servants 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.”

Jesus declared that we who believe and obey him are “friends of God” along with the great Old Testament figures of Abraham and Moses. And as we abide in his word and in prayer God reveals his very mind to us. We know what God is thinking as much as any mortals can know. And so, like good friends of God we can sing, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

And we can revel in this, that Jesus has chosen us on purpose for a purpose. Verse 16 says, **“You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last,..”** Remember from last week I spoke to you about what that “fruit” will be? It will be works of love.

The amazing thing about it is what Jesus is creating for us when we obey him is a circle of obedience: love, joy, works of love that lead us back again after pruning to abiding, obedience, love, joy and works of love.

Our obedience leads us to love one another. And for now, we will continue in the Love of separation the masks, the social distancing etc. until this virus is a bad memory. We’re almost there. We are closer to the end than the beginning.

So, hold on in patience. And if your patience is gone hold on.

Hold on in Love so that your joy may be complete.

What is God saying to you and what are you going to do?

In Jesus’ name amen.

