

I command you to love  
John 15:9-17

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

How many of you have ever seen a little league baseball game or peewee football game, or basketball game, or even a soccer, tennis or lacrosse match? What happens when the game is over? After one team or individual has won and the other has lost, what is expected to take place? A shaking of hands, is the required expected norm. Now let me tell you that shaking of hands ritual is dangerous. The teams have been just going at it and the frustration of losing or pride of winning is still fresh in the minds of the players.

Believe it or not I played on a soccer team two years when I was like 9 or 10 .While I wasn't the best athlete and I obviously didn't stick with it, it was kinda fun. However the coach did insist that after each game we do the handshake ritual with the other teams. Now that wouldn't have been so bad if we would have won a game or two, but most weeks we lost, we lost bad. Week in and week out we were slaughtered on the field and then the coach made us shake the hands of the other team that just cleaned our clocks. We lined up and eyed each other up, made faces, bumped shoulders, squeezed hands, pulling and jerking. We didn't want to be there shaking hands with the people who just beat us badly, we wanted out of there. The only reason we did it is because the Coaches made us do it. With threats of sitting on the bench we were forced to be civil or at least pretend to be civil.

Today Jesus commands that we love one another as he has loved us. Easier said than done isn't it. We know Jesus tells us to do it but when it comes down to it we really don't want to. We can care about some one, we can feel empathy for someone, we can feel bad for someone, but to love them, well that is just not what we consider easy to do.

After all the world tells us Love is a feeling, an emotion that we can not control. It is a whirlwind affair that you fall into, your entranced. They say you can be head over heels in love, you can even get dumb struck with love like a sickness or cupid can hit you with an arrow, but to say your commanded to love, well that's not how we define it. Jesus should know better than to say he commands us to love one another as he has loved us. If we're honest we know that just ain't going to happen.

But what if Jesus is right and we are wrong about the meaning of love. By Jesus using that command to love perhaps it means more than just the adolescent crush or a

desire. Perhaps Jesus is commanding us to action, to be something, to be full of something. To be overflowing with something. And that is the love that God has given to us. That we love each other as he has loved us.

It is a reaction to the love that has been poured out upon us. As God has loved us so we should love others. This command is not like the Old Testament commands, where to be right with God you need to first do this, this and this, its not even like the ten commandments where God declares that the people of God must keep to the covenant by 1. Having no other gods before Our Lord. 2. Not taking the Lord's name in vain. 3. Remembering the Sabbath day. 4. Honoring your Father and Mother. 5. You shall not kill. 6. You shall not commit adultery. 7. You shall not steal. 8. You shall not bear false witness. 9. You shall not covet your neighbor's spouse. 10. You shall not covet your neighbor's property and possessions. All in order to keep in God's good grace.

But this commandment that Jesus lays down is different, because we have already received God's grace, we have been blessed with forgiveness of sins, we have been chosen as brothers and sisters, children of the heavenly kingdom now and forever. We are called on to be in relationship with God as baptized members of the eternal family. And in that relationship of Love that is poured out on us we can, we are able, we are commanded to pour that same love out to all others. To be in that same relationship with others. It is a call to action, a call to share that loving relationship of God and us with others.

Jesus throughout the Gospel of John commands his disciples in such a way. Way back at the beginning after Jesus comes up out of the baptismal waters, two students of John the Baptist follow Jesus. When asked why they are following, they respond that they want to know where the Jesus is staying. Jesus commands them to Come and See, to come into relationship with him and be with him. The very next day Jesus goes to Galilee And comes upon Philip and commands him to come and follow me, to be in relationship with him. Later on, after the feeding of the five thousand, The disciples are caught in a storm on the sea of Galilee and Jesus comes walking across the water to them and joining them he commands them not to be afraid, don't be afraid I am with you. At the last Supper he says the same thing again, assuring them to not let their hearts be troubled, that he goes to prepare a place for them and will come and bring them to this place, to be with them always. And of course today we get the command to abide in his love as he has abiding in the love of God. Stay in that relationship of love. So as you can see the commands of Jesus are about a relationship of love, abiding in love, coming and seeing the love. Not so much laws of how to receive the love but rather how to share in the love.

But that still doesn't make it easy. Even though we are given that relationship of love it is still not easy doing the handshake ritual with our enemies. Jesus commands us to love one another as he has loved us, but I want to warn you it may not be easy. That love that Jesus wants us to do is costly love. It is not easy. Jesus came to save humanity and he was rejected. Jesus came in love and the world responded with hostility and violence, and still he loved. Jesus went to the cross because he loved even the very persecutors, perpetrators and traitors surrounded him and called for his death.

That is the love we are commanded to share. We are called on to overcome our human sinfulness, our urge to give in to the hatred, anger, frustration, contempt and instead show love as Jesus has given to us. We are in that love through the sacrifice of Jesus and so are reminded to live in that same righteousness now and always in all that we do. And then Jesus takes it even one step further by telling his disciples that they are no longer servants but friends. They are no longer in the relationship of God the all powerful, ruling, overseeing, all powerful above us. And we are now longer in the relationship with God as people trying to acquire something, to gain something, as students and servants do. They want to pass, approval, good pay, advancement, whatever, but that is not the relationship Jesus is talking about. Instead it is a relationship of true friendship. No longer are there status of above and below. No longer is there the one above trying to get the ones below to do something. No longer are there the ones below trying to get the one above to accept or approve. Instead we are in active life of caring, hoping, working for the best of someone else before ourselves. That is the love and friendship Jesus is in with us and commands us to continue to live in for others.

We no longer do it because the coach tells us to do it. We no longer do it because we want to appease the one who is more powerful than us. We no longer do it because we want to gain something by it. We love because God has loved us. We love and live sharing that love of relationship in all that we do because it is who we are. May you share that love today. May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty Lord, you loved the world so much that you sent to us your Son, who came not to condemn the world but to save it. Through him you call us your friends, you make us your own and your children now and forever. We give you thanks for this great gift continue to bless us with your spirit and guide us in all of your ways.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

O Heavenly Father, we ask that you come upon this place with your heavenly spirit. Enter here and rest upon us your servants to lift up your word, to sing your praise and welcome all into your fellowship. Transform us and empower us to be your servants in this time and place and send us out as your witnesses to all the world, sent with a mission of spreading your love and grace to our community and beyond.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

God, stretch out your saving hand to those who are sick. With your strong love, comfort the lonely, the oppressed, and all who suffer. Give courage to those facing surgery. Give healing to those who are afflicted. Give peace to those troubled both physically and mentally. Impart your Holy Comforter to be with them in their times of need. Especially we remember today our hospitalized, our homebound and all those we name now in our prayers to you Joe Kraus, Dave Reigel and all those we name now in our prayers to you.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for your creation. The world exists in the fallenness of sin and have turned from you, and we face hardships and destruction, war and violence. Continue to inspire all people to turn back to you and to return to your ways. Lift up all those who need comfort this day Lord, comfort from sickness, disease, and famine, those facing hardships of disasters or floods. Be with those fighting for justice and for peace in all the world against oppression, hatred and greed. Grant your Spirit of Peace and Hope to all people of this world so that we may see in you the glory of your creation.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, O Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.