
AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS, WE SEE JESUS' LOVE FOR USSermon for the 6th Sunday of Easter, 2018

John 15:9-17

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel we heard before, John 15:9-17: **⁹ “As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Remain in My love! ¹⁰ If you keep My Commandments, you will remain in My love, as I have also kept My Father’s Commandments and remain in His love. ¹¹ I have told you these things that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² This is My Commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you continue to do what I command you. ¹⁵ I no longer call you ‘servants,’ because a servant does not know what his master is doing. However, I have called you ‘friends’ because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from My Father. ¹⁶ You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and appointed you that you may go and bear fruit and that your fruit may remain, that the Father may give you whatever you ask for in My name. ¹⁷ This is what I command you: Love one another!**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Through the season of Lent, we are given the opportunity to remember that it is at the foot of the cross where we view the depth of Christ’s loving friendship with us. “*I am the Good Shepherd,*” Jesus reminds us, the Good Shepherd who “*lays down His life for the sheep,*” (John 10:11). Jesus’ whole passion experience shows this loving friendship He has for us.

Jesus has loved us with the same heavenly, divine, consuming love which the Father has for His own Son. With our *finite* mind we simply cannot comprehend the *infinite* love Jesus shows toward us. As our hands cannot reach the stars, so with our thoughts we cannot reach the heaven of Christ's divine love. As *deep* as is the mystery of life itself, so unfathomable is the mystery of God's love shown to us. As *incomprehensible* as is the divine nature of God, so impenetrable is the majesty, the length and breadth, the depth and height, of the divine love of Christ.

At Christmas time we celebrate the message of the incarnation of the Son of God. This message causes us to kneel with those shepherds in adoring amazement at the manger of the Christ-child and to say with astonishment: "*The Word became flesh*," (John 1:14). With startled hearts we see the Son of God in the form of a servant going about Palestine doing good, pouring celestial light upon the eyes of the blind, causing the dumb to sing hymns of praise and the sick to rise from their disabilities of pain and walk and the dead to rise with new vigour of life. We stop and wonder when we see divine Holiness come into the misery of sin's wretchedness to seek and to save that which is lost.¹ But what shall we say when we stand at the foot of the cross and see in its fullest magnificence and glory the saying of our Lord: ¹³ **No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends?**

The day after Jesus spoke these words, He would make the greatest sacrifice for His friends, when He would give His life for them. For those who because of their sins and iniquities ought to taste the curse of the Law, the wrath of God, the bitterness of death - for those who in no wise have any claim upon His love, Jesus dies the death of a criminal and accursed outcast. It is for the guilty that the Guiltless One suffers on the cross, for the curse-ridden the Beloved of the Father becomes a curse,² for the children of death the Prince of Life plunges into death, and for the candidates of hell God endures the torments of the damned.

¹ Luke 19:10

² Galatians 3:13

When we stand at the foot of the rugged cross and witness the agony and torture and death of the Son of God *on our behalf*, surely, we must wonder, was there ever greater love than His?

The greatness of this divine love for such worms as we, surely sends a cold chill through our mortal frame, and makes our lips mute in silent praise as we bend our knees in adoration.

Remember, too, that Jesus brings this sacrifice not with an unwilling spirit, but willingly and with joy. He does not die because He must die, but because He wants to die. *“I lay down My life, that I may take it back again.”*¹⁸ *No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord.”* (John 10:18). Jesus lays down His own life. He is not driven to the cross as the beast is dragged to the slaughter. With inward joy Jesus offers His life on the altar of the cross for the redemption of a guilty world, for sinners such as you and I. On the night of His betrayal, with the ugly cross looming up before Him, Jesus speaks of His joy when He says, **“I have told you these things that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete,”** that is, the joy of doing the Father’s will and finishing the work which the Father had given Him to do. So stirred and fired was Jesus with the flame of love to us, that pain became joy to His soul.

As friends of Jesus, we have gathered in spirit at the foot of the cross. On this ground, hallowed by the suffering and blood of the Son of God, we must appreciate deeply the love which wrought our redemption and then also the love that has made us friends of the Crucified. Jesus says, **“¹⁴ You are My friends if you continue to do what I command you. ¹⁵ I no longer call you ‘servants,’ because a servant does not know what his master is doing. However, I have called you ‘friends’ because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from My Father. ¹⁶ You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.”** We have not chosen Jesus, but He has chosen us. Before the foundation of the earth was laid, He in love thought of us and *chose us to be holy and blameless in His sight*, (Ephesians 1:4). And in time, by the power of His cross, He drew our hearts to Himself in tender mercy. **I have called you ‘friends’ because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from My Father.**

Our Friend has taken us into the secrets of the mysterious counsels of God and revealed to us the marvellous plan of redemption of a sin-lost world. Christ has enlightened our eyes to trace the beauty of mercy and love in the appearance marred by suffering and drawn in agonising pain. While the Crucified Christ with sadness of heart must look out over the money-mad and pleasure-crazed children of the world, who pass by the cross in cold indifference or open hostility, we can praise the saving compassion of our Lord, who by His Law has quickened in our hearts the consciousness of our sinful and lost condition and the insufficiency of man-made righteousness, and by the sweet and magnetic voice of the Gospel has halted us on our mad rush to hell and brought us to trust in Christ Crucified for atonement of sin, for pardon of evil, for peace with God, and for hope against the night of wasting death. Our salvation is not by merit of intellectual insight or self-decision, but by the drawing power of the cross. We have blissful fellowship of Jesus and His grace, we have the blessedness of His love and friendship, so **that (our) joy may be complete**. We join with that holy company of saints and friends of Jesus who gathers to sing praises unto the Lamb that was slain and has redeemed us to God by His blood, and into that sacred life of prayer through which we pour out *all we need* in the name of the Crucified into the bosom of the Father, certain that help is at hand for the sake of Him who died for us.

At the foot of the cross, then, we behold the depth of a Saviour's love as it is mirrored in our redemption and salvation. It is our joy and bliss to know the love of the heavenly Friend and the merciful compassion of our God, which has made us friends of Jesus and partakers of the Father's guiding, helping love.

The cross is the ground of our redemption and salvation. It is also the ideal and pattern, the power and strength, of our Christian life. At the foot of the cross we sense the duty of love incumbent upon us. Jesus urges us to **love one another as I have loved you**.

The ideal of life which is set before us is lofty. The life of Christ is to be the pattern of our life. Being friends of Jesus, we are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. The fire of ardent and self-sacrificing love which burned in the heart of Jesus and brought Him to the cross is to be kindled in our soul and

kept brightly burning. It is never easy, but we are to lay our life on the altar of love, seeking the spiritual and physical betterment of our fellowmen. We are to **love one another**. This life of love is the very purpose of our life, the aim Jesus had in view when He chose us to be His friends.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross shows us the measure of the love we ought to show to our fellowmen. It also is the source of this love.

Love begets love. Jesus loved us, and we love Him who died for us. Christ is our Friend, and we are friends of the Redeemer. We are not driven by the whip of the Law to our tasks; but as loving friends who share the Saviour's heart, we shun the sins of selfishness and hatred against others because such attitude and action grieve our Friend, and we follow after the service of love to others because we seek the Saviour's joy and desire to remain in His love. Not to have our life ruled by love to Jesus, and for His sake by love to our fellow-Christians, means *severance of the bonds of friendship* which unite us to Christ and loss of Jesus' love. And what a loss that is!

The strength for service is rooted in faith which touches the cross. The motive of our Christian life is love to Him who loved us unto death. The more intense our love to Jesus, the more burning will be our love to each other, and the more will we experience the joy of the Christ-life. We will be extremely happy knowing that the Saviour's smile is resting upon us, that the Redeemer's love is blessing us, transcendently happy in the thrill of the fruitful life of permanent worth and lasting value. The unselfish life of loving service is the happy life.

What a paradise on earth the home-life and the congregational life would be if we could be perfect in this love!

The cross, then, grounded in the depths of divine love, must be the moral dynamo of your Christian life. When you leave God's house today, go to your homes and to your daily tasks and, as chosen friends of Jesus, scatter the warmth of Christ-breathed love in a world cold as ice in selfishness and make your life rich in works of Christian affection and noble service to those all around you. Jesus has loved you with an undying love and has left us with the command: **Love one another!**

May we continue with the Lord's help to do just that. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER.

Lord, our God, You alone know the plans that You have for us and our world, but we rejoice and worship You because we know that they are loving plans. In Your goodness, You spread life, love, beauty, and joy throughout Your creation. In Your grace, You lighten the misery of our sinful lives, and bless us with pardon and peace. If it is your will that we must pass through troubles, enable us to turn them into opportunities, for Your glory.

We give You our warmest thanks for the precious gift of Your Son, Jesus, whom You have sent that we may have life in all its fullness. We praise You that He has humbly come into our world, has taken on Himself our sins, and has carried them to death on the cross. We glorify Your name for our release from the power of death, and for our sure hope of heaven through His resurrection.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the privilege of being Your spiritual priests, as we pray in Jesus' name. We thank You for Your promise to hear all our prayers. Keep us close to Jesus each day in faith and love, gladly hearing His Word and following Him, wherever He leads us. Send Your Word out into the whole world, that it may achieve what You have planned for it. Let us as Your representatives, whom You have called out of darkness, proclaim Your light in this dark world. Give us the courage also to speak Your word of judgment when people reject Christ, the Cornerstone.

Bless Your Church on every continent. Renew Your people to be a loving fellowship of believers, a family of trust and prayer, and people who are ready to serve the needy in love. Continue to bless the fellowship we share with the ULMA.

Lead all the nations of the earth along the ways of justice, righteousness, and peace. Look with special favour on our country. Give to our Prime Minister, to the Premiers of each State, to our cabinets and parliaments, to our police and to our courts, such qualities of heart and mind that they may carry out their duties earnestly, wisely, and fairly. Protect us from all enemies, both within and without our country. Remove all strife from us. Inspire obedience to all law and order. Fill all citizens with love of holiness and moral purity. Grant that all

who work in industry may find joy in their work and receive proper rewards for their efforts. Give satisfaction to those who work in the professions, as they work for the good of all. Give those who farm the soil favourable weather. Bless their work of feeding the world.

Bless all our loved ones and make our homes places of peace. We remember especially the sick, the troubled, and the bereaved. In Jesus' name free them from the burdens of their pain and sadness.

Keep us standing strong and steady in faith. Since serving You is never useless, give us the opportunity to be busy in Your work. In Jesus' saving name we offer You these prayers. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 10:34-48

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: "Now I realise that it is true that God does not show favouritism, ³⁵ but that in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. ³⁶ You know the Word that God has sent to the people of Israel to tell the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what took place throughout Judea. It began in Galilee after the baptism that John preached. ³⁸ It was about Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and power. He went around doing good and healing all who were under the tyranny of the Devil, because God was with Him. ³⁹ We are witnesses of all the things that He did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also executed Him by hanging Him on a

tree. ⁴⁰ This man God raised on the third day and caused Him to be seen.

⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people but by witnesses whom God had selected beforehand, by us, who ate and drank with Him after He had risen from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that this is the One whom God has appointed to be the judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about Him, that, through His name, everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who were hearing the Word. ⁴⁵ The believers who had been circumcised, namely, all those who had come with Peter, were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were

hearing them speaking in tongues and glorifying God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ “Surely no one can refuse water, that these people should not be baptised? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we also have.”

⁴⁸ He ordered that they should be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.

1 John 5:1-8

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the child who has been fathered by Him. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and carry out His Commandments. ³ For this is love for God: that we keep His Commandments. His Commands are also not burdensome. ⁴ For whatever has been born from God conquers the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith. ⁵ Who is the one who conquers the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? ⁶ This is the One who has come through water and blood: Jesus Christ. He has not come by water only but by water and by blood. Moreover, it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is

the Truth. ⁷ There are three who are giving witness: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood, and these three have one purpose.

John 15:9-17

⁹ “As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Remain in My love!

¹⁰ If you keep My Commandments, you will remain in My love, as I have also kept My Father’s Commandments and remain in His love. ¹¹ I have told you these things that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² This is My Commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you continue to do what I command you. ¹⁵ I no longer call you ‘servants,’ because a servant does not know what his master is doing. However, I have called you ‘friends’ because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from My Father. ¹⁶ You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and appointed you that you may go and bear fruit and that your fruit may remain, that the Father may give you whatever you ask for in My name. ¹⁷ This is what I command you: Love one another!