

**21st Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Cory's Confirmation 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 the sermon is the Gospel 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 so 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, so 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 in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

Today's Gospel continues from the previous passages of John where it says, Jesus compared our relationship to Him with the relationship between a branch and a vine. Just as a branch cannot produce anything without the vine, so we cannot do anything without Jesus.

Jesus wants us to have this picture in mind of a branch lovingly grafted into the main vine. If the branch does absolutely nothing, the main vine will incorporate the branch into itself and the branch will thrive. If the branch tries to contribute anything to the process, it will mess up the process. The branch will go into rejection and die.

We've learned from John previously that abiding means to do nothing - to simply remain. We learned that the Holy Spirit places us in Jesus through faith and that we are to abide or remain in Jesus where He will feed us with forgiveness, life, and salvation.

As we hear more of Jesus' teaching today. We learn that the main nutrient is that Jesus, the vine, feeds to us, the branches, is the nutrient of love. [Jesus said,] **“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.”**

Believe it or not, the word "love" causes problems. The problem is that love is one of the most overworked words in the English language. We use this word for so many different things. We love our spouse. We love our children. We love our house. We love our cars. We love ice cream. We love football. We love sunsets. We love so many different things and we love in so many different ways. If you look up the word love in the dictionary, you will find a very long entry.

So now we come to the place where we are confessing our faith and we say that we receive salvation because of "God's love." Now while this is absolutely true and good, it's not enough. It's not enough because the word love covers such a wide variety of experiences and meanings. Now don't misunderstand me. It's perfectly good, right, and worthwhile to say that God saves us through His love. On the other hand, if we don't say what we mean when we say that God loves us, we haven't told the whole story of His love - we haven't told the story of the nutrition that Jesus gives us as we abide in Him.

We can begin by looking at the original Greek. The word translated as love is "ἀγάπη" agape. We have talked about this word before. 'Αγάπη certainly gets us away from self centered love - love that is the result of fulfilling our own pleasures. It certainly rules out the ooey-gooey, touchy-feely kind of love. 'Αγάπη is a selfless love that seeks nothing in return. 'Αγάπη has grit and courage. 'Αγάπη does what is right even when

it is hard. The Greek word ἀγάπη does much to get us closer to a true understanding of the love Jesus gives to us when we remain in Him.

In today's Gospel Jesus takes 'Αγάπη all the way when He says, "**No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends.**" Jesus did more than talk about laying down His life for His friends. Even while Jesus was teaching His disciples with the words of today's Gospel, Judas was on his way to the authorities. He would soon lead soldiers to Jesus in Gethsemane. There Judas would betray Jesus. The very next day, Jesus would fulfill His very description of love with His own suffering and death on the cross. He would endure not only death, but also the anger of God at all of our sins. This is the love that saves us.

The true nature of this love becomes even clearer when we consider the object of God's love. As much as we hate to admit it, we have no redeeming qualities of our own. We are sinners.

The young man who is about to be confirmed today will tell you that we have all broken every one of the Ten Commandments. Every time we finished one of the commandments in class, the question was always the same. We never asked, "Do we break this commandment?" Instead, we always asked, "How do we break this commandment?" As we discussed the commandments in open honesty, we discovered that we break every one of them - every day - many times. We discovered that it is very difficult to commit just one sin, but that the commandments fall like dominos before us.

We've also discovered that we are not sinners because we sin, but that we sin because we are sinners. We learned that every one of us inherits sin from our parents. Just like a mother who uses illicit drugs, passes the addiction on to her child, so also, all humans pass their sin on to their children. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in Eden, parents have passed their sin on to their kids. No one has to teach a child how to lie. No one has to teach a child to be selfish. No one has to teach a child how to hate. No one has to teach a child to consider himself or herself to be the center of this and every other universe. But we do have to teach them the WORD of GOD. We know all these things from the womb. As we studied the Ten Commandments, we learned that our condition, if left untreated, leads to nothing but punishment - punishment here in time and punishment forever in eternity.

In spite of all this, God still loves us. The love of Jesus Christ on the cross is the perfect expression of God and therefore the perfect expression of God's love for us. "**God shows His own love for us by this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" [Romans 5:8.] His love for us depends on His nature, not our nature. His love for us is always perfect and beyond our understanding. This is the love that we receive when we abide in Him.

Jesus said, "**Remain in my love.**" This is the love of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. This is the great love that lays down life for a friend. This is the love of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the love of the God-man who stood between God and us and took the full force of the wrath of God for us. This is the love that bled on the cross and said, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**" [Luke 23:34] This is the love that rose from the dead and promises us eternal life.

The Devil, the World, and our own sinful flesh seek to cut off this relationship of love between our Saviour and us. Our enemies continuously tell us that we don't need God - that we can be our own god - that we can fulfill our own need for love. They direct us to pleasure, comfort, security, popularity, and other fallible sources of love. When these things fail, our enemies accuse us of not trying hard enough. We find ourselves in a never-ending spiral of delusion and defeat.

The world is always ready to supply the next exciting thing when the current fad doesn't satisfy our need for love. If only you drove the right car or wore the right styles or lived in the right house. If only you had married someone like that exciting celebrity instead of that boring spouse that lives with you now. If only you wore the right cologne or had fuller, longer lashes. The world hurls an impossible life style at us and our own sinful nature tells us that these things can bring us happiness and love. We expend massive amounts of resources to obtain these things that never satisfy us while we ignore the God who wants to give us the ultimate true love for free.

Jesus said, "**Remain in my love.**" **Remain** means Abide; stop trying in your own power. The Holy Spirit has placed us in Christ Jesus through the gift of faith. Any work we do on our own only serves to reject that faith and expel us from Christ's love. Abiding in God's love means that He will work in us to strengthen our faith toward Him and He will work through us to show fervent love toward our brothers.

Cory; In a few minutes you will confess the faith that receives this love of God that is beyond our understanding. You will make promises to God in the presence of these people. Basically, you will promise to stay where the Holy Spirit has placed you - that is you will promise to simply abide in the faith that He has given to you - the faith that receives the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Cory we have discussed the answers you will be giving, but it is good for the rest of the congregation to review the meaning of these answers. When You answer, "**I do, by the grace of God,**" you are admitting that you cannot keep these promises in your own reason or strength. Instead, you are relying on God by His grace to keep these promises in you and through you. If God in His love "**is for us, who can be against us? 32 How will He not, who did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for us all, along with Him, also freely give us all things?** [Romans 8:31,32.]

It's also good for those of us who have been confirmed and will soon witness the answers of our brother in Christ, to recall the promises we made to God at our confirmation. Where we have kept these promises, we can give thanks to Almighty God for His grace in keeping them. Where we have failed, we can give thanks for the forgiveness that Jesus Christ earned for us on the cross - that in spite of our sin, the Holy Spirit can place us back in Christ's love.

God loves us unconditionally. He is the only source of pure, unconditional, ἀγάπη love. It's in this love that God created us and still sustains us. It's this love that compelled the Son of God to assume a human nature and sacrifice Himself on the cross to save us from sin. It's in this love that we abide by faith. Just as God's love raised Christ from the dead, it promises that He will be with us here on this earth and that we shall be with Him forever in heaven. By faith this love works in us and through us to free us so that we can obey God's command and love our brother even as God has loved us. **Amen**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

### **Prayer for the 21st Sunday in Pentecost.**

P Gathered in the name of Jesus and assured of His promised presence, let us call on our heavenly Father for ourselves, for our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world, and for all people.

*Brief Silence,*

P For our New catechumen Cory, and all the faithful, redeemed by Christ's blood, that they ever grow in their trust in Christ for life and salvation, Lord in your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For those who are persecuted for their faith, that God continue to keep them steadfast in His truth and comfort them when they are assailed by the old evil foe, Lord in your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For a spirit of thankfulness for the daily bread that God gives us, teaching us not to put our trust in earthly things but to use them in loving service to our neighbour, Lord in your mercy,

**C hear our prayer**

P For opportunities to enjoy godly leisure and rest, that our bodies may be refreshed and our minds reinvigorated to carry out the callings that God gives us, Lord in your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For labourers for the harvest. Instill in the men of our congregations a love and a receptive heart for Your name, so that from their number You might raise up some to serve as pastors to Your flock. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For our pastors and their families. Bless Your Church and all the congregations of the A.E.L.C. For our government and all who make, administer, and judge our laws; and for all who serve in our armed forces, that

they be strengthened and upheld in every good deed, Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For those who care for the sick and injured, especially doctors, nurses, technicians, and all medical workers, that they carry out their calling with joy and dedication as they seek to preserve life and care for all, Lord in your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For those whose physical health is at risk [especially \_\_\_\_\_], that God relieve their suffering, heal their wounds, and give them strength to bear their infirmities with grace, Lord in your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For all who mourn [especially \_\_\_\_\_], that in their time of sorrow they not lose sight of Your promise of a joyful reunion in heaven with those they love who have died in the faith, Lord in your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For Your invitation, that we joyfully gather around the banquet table of Your Son Jesus to feast on His life-giving body and blood. Grant us the sure confidence of sins forgiven and fellowship restored within the body of Your Son, the Church. let us pray to the Lord:

**C Lord, have mercy.**

P Remembering the sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, we place our petitions at Your throne of mercy, trusting Your promise to hear our prayers and grant us all that we need for this life and the life to come, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**C Amen.**