

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Easter 6 – May 10<sup>th</sup> and 13, 2012

### **John 15:9-17**

**“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.**

Dear members of God’s family.

How many of you remember the day that you were born? Do you remember back 10-15 years or maybe 30-40 years or maybe even 70-80 years or more when you were little and growing up? Do you remember the years of your youth when you started out life in your mother’s arms being rocked to sleep? Do you remember the first day you went to school and your mom watched with tears rolling down her cheeks? Do you remember the years of your parents carting you off to different activities like band, soccer, baseball or piano. Truth be told for most of us we look back at those years and say wouldn’t it be great if we could go back in time and become a young child again. Why couldn’t we stay that age forever? Life was so simple, but the fact is that we can’t stay young forever. We all will grow up and we need to realize that this is going to happen, both on a physical level and a spiritual level.

That exact thing happened last Sunday. Last Sunday we witnessed 18 young people stand in the front of Church and make their public declarations of their faith. In a way they were growing up spiritually. These young people were baptized into God’s family and over the years in Sunday school, Christian Day School, Catechism Classes and in their homes seen their faith grow up right before our eyes. There is no going back -- they are moving past the years of their youth in a spiritually way. They are not grown up, but it is a great thing to watch as their faith has continued to grow and will continue to grow long into the future. And much like physical growth which we cannot stop, we need to remind ourselves that our spiritual growth never reaches an end.

Today, with Confirmation Day still fresh in our minds as these young people come to the Lord’s table for the Lord’s Supper for the first of God-willing many more times, we hear Jesus’ special words of encouragement for them and for all Christians as we continue our spiritual growth. John writes, **“Remain in my love.”** It is that word love that we are going to dwell on today. Our theme is:

### **Theme: God Loves Us!**

- 1. Remain in his love**
- 2. Love each other**

**“Remain in my love.”** First of all we have to ask ourselves, “What is God’s love?” Jesus gives us a hint with the Greek word he uses for love: “Agape.” Agape love is selfless, it is a love that gives and does not seek anything in return. It is a love that is pure. Agape love has unselfish motives. This is the kind of love Jesus has for us. How did he demonstrate his love to us? I think we know the answer and Jesus gives it to us in vs13, **“Greater (agape) love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”** That’s about the most unselfish, humble and generous thing we could do for our friends. But how many kids would take their friend’s place in detention or the principal’s office or sitting in their room

grounded so they can go out and play? How many adults would trade places with someone in jail? Probably not many of us. But this is what Jesus did for us. He was punished as our substitute for our sins. He died in our place. He suffered hell for us. That's agape love!

But what does it really mean to, "**Remain in my love.**" This is more than a phrase. This is a lifestyle. It means that for our entire life, we will allow the love that Christ showed to us to show itself in the way we love others. We will always keep Christ's love in our thoughts, on our lips in all of our actions. To remain in that love, we will make the most of every opportunity to come into contact with Christ's love. We are doing that right now, by being in worship, by participating in the Lord's Supper, by attending Sunday School, Teen or Adult Bible study, by studying the Bible in your home with our family. Sounds easy, right, to remain in Christ's love?

The problem is there are enemies out there who don't want us to remain in Christ's love or to show that love to others. Our number one enemy is Satan. He will tempt us with all sorts of "fun" activities to make sure that we no longer show the love of Christ in our life, to ensure that we stray from Christ's love. One of the ways he will try to accomplish this is through our friends or "friends" who really aren't our friends. This applies to both young and old, Here's how it may go down... our boyfriend or girlfriend may try to convince us that since society says it's ok, having sex if you're not married is an acceptable thing to do. Our friends will encourage us to rebel against mom and dad's rules, because parents just don't understand. Our friends might try to convince us that it's ok to go against the rules of our government in regards to smoking or drinking, or partying with drugs. Our friends will convince us that staying up all Saturday night and sleeping in on Sunday morning is more important than being with God's people and God's Word. Our friends will convince us that spending more time with them and video games and music is more important than some quality time with God's Word and in prayer. Pretty soon we might find ourselves no longer feeding on God's Word but starving ourselves. Eventually we might forget who our true friend is and what he did for us 2000 years ago on a cross outside of Jerusalem.

To remain one of Christ's friends will not be easy. If we are true to ourselves and honest with our lives and actions, I think we all have to admit, that by our actions, our thoughts and our words that we already have not shown Jesus' love to others. I think that we would have to admit that we have not always allowed Christ's love to feed our soul. That's when God's law hits us like a sledgehammer. He should no longer call us his friends, but enemies. For not following his commands he should no longer make us members of his home in heaven but residents in hell for all eternity. The threat of God's wrath beats us down, it condemns us, it exposes our sinful behaviors. That's when you and I, in humble repentance, need to admit our sins, and turn to Jesus, and seek his forgiveness. And if we should ever wonder, "Does Jesus still love me? Does he still call me his friend?" He says to us, "I do love you. I have always loved you. Yes, you are my friend. Look! I'll prove it to you! I laid down my life for you."

Think about this. Would we lay down our life for our friends? Let's say that a group of your friends us is walking down Main Street and are crossing the street and you see a large truck barreling down the street. Would you risk your own life to push your friends out of the way, or would you dive out of the way to save yourself? That's a beautiful picture of what Jesus did for us. An oncoming Mack truck was zooming down on us: God's wrath was coming, headed straight for us, to smash us to smithereens in hell for all eternity because of our sins of not following his commandments, for not showing his love in our life, for following the ways and ideas of this sinful world. But Jesus pushed us out of the way and let himself be punished by God's wrath, to be tortured, to experience the pains of hell for us, to die for us, to rescue us from God's wrath. That's agape love. And Jesus never asks us to pay him back – because we cannot. He does not set a condition on his love. He says, "Remain in my love."

He gives us all a special gift to remain in his love: the Means of Grace; the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Maybe we know of a classmate in school who is failing math or social studies or science. The teacher assigns a tutor to help that student so she or he doesn't fail. In the same way, Jesus knows you and I cannot stand up to Satan's temptations all by ourselves. He knows that we fail. So he offers us the Means of Grace to strengthen us. The Means of Grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Through his Word,

Jesus lifts us up with these words, **“Cast all your anxiety on me, because I care for you.”** He says, **“Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you and you will honor me.”** He says, **“I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** The Gospel in Sacrament... Through baptism, Jesus reminds us over and over again that our sins have been washed away and that a new person has been created in us who wants to do God's will. In a few minutes some of you will, for the first time, have a taste of the heavenly banquet that Jesus is preparing for you. Others of you will be coming for the umpteenth time. In this sacred meal, Jesus offers us to eat and drink his body and blood with this bread and wine, and through it offers us forgiveness, salvation from sins, death, devil, offers and grants eternal life. Jesus gives us the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to remain in his love.

So to those who were just confirmed and are just beginning their earthly journey and to those of us who have been around the proverbial block, don't be a stranger. Be faithful with our participation in the Lord's Supper. Be faithful in our worship and Bible study attendance. Be faithful in our home Bible studies and don't just read his Word, study it, meditate on it, pray about it. Because we know that to remain in his love, the next 10-20 years, the next 60-70 years, will be difficult. Satan will try his hardest to drag us away. Remain faithful and we will remain in Christ's love, and Christ will remain in us. May the Holy Spirit through his Word and Sacraments strengthen us to remain in Christ's love all the days of our life until eternity. Amen