

In Jesus' name. **Amen**

Dearly beloved by the Lord,

On this festival of the Holy Trinity, we reflect on one of the attributes or characteristics of the Trinity.

St. John speaks of it very clearly in his 1st letter when he writes: "**God is love.**" ^{1 John 4:8}

And the wonderful news of the Gospel is that the Triune God's love is focused on YOU.

You are the object of His infinite and great compassion.

And it is no more clearly seen than through the account of Jesus' passion and death FOR YOU.

Our text for meditation this morning is a continuation of last week's text

where we heard Jesus speak of Himself as the Vine and His disciples as the branches.

Our text for meditation... as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said,] "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another." ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Jesus called His disciples His friends.

That they were His friends was demonstrated by Him revealing to them what God was doing.

God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) was being & giving love through Jesus' coming passion&death.

God's love took on that cruciform shape on account of our lovelessness,

both towards Him and towards our fellow man.

This is not a new thought to us. From the 10 Commandments,

we recognize God's good and gracious will is that we have perfect love just as He does.

In other words, a **love** that is **patient and kind; not envious or boastful; not arrogant or rude;**

not insisting on its own way, not irritable or resentful; not rejoicing in wrongdoing,

but rejoices with the truth... and so on. ^(1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

But this isn't how we are, is it? Irritable, impatient, envious, proud, rude.

Who doesn't like things their own way?

Who doesn't hold on to resentment?

Who doesn't intrinsically enjoy seeing your adversary get his comeuppance, even if by means of another's wrongdoing?

(No, you didn't personally get the revenge you want to against your adversary, but neither will you lose sleep over his affliction or misery.)

But this is not God's will for us. And so in Leviticus, He told the OT Christians:

"you shall love your neighbor as yourself." ^(Leviticus 19:18)

&To selfish human beings without a perfect example, what better standard can you give regarding love?

Consider how many parents try to teach their children empathy and love for others.

After Johnny hits Billy, they stop Johnny and ask him, "How would you like it if Billy hit you?"
So there his father would teach him to consider Billy's feelings as if they were his own.

But this is not a perfect standard of love, because we love ourselves with a selfish, imperfect love.
I might be okay with calling myself a jerk, so I feel justified in calling others such rude names also.
I might feel accustomed to giving myself a guilt-trip, and so I feel fine doing the same to others.
I might have a lazy disposition, so who am I to encourage others to diligence.
But loving others as yourself is not a loop-hole to God's command to love.
We aren't vindicated because we've loved someone imperfectly as we have imperfectly loved ourselves.

And being that we struggle with the simpler task of loving our neighbor,
then we certainly can't love rightly God as St. John writes,
**"he who does not love his brother whom he has seen
cannot love God whom he has not seen."** 1 John 4:20

Instead God's command shows what the Law is supposed to show: it shows our sins,
our inability to know God's Law and will perfectly and to keep it perfectly.
It shows our sin... and points us to our need for a Savior.
It identifies the reason that our natural fruit of love is bitter, rotten and repugnant to our holy God.

Might you guess, then, where our delightful, fruit of love comes from?
Well, if the branches get their nutrients from the sap of the Vine, then our love comes from Jesus.
And in our text, Jesus gives the Church the perfect standard:
This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
Now we can't justify our own imperfect love and imagine that God is good with it.
Now we see the true depth of our lovelessness,
as we hear of Him giving of Himself to the point of exhaustion on multiple occasions,
as we see Jesus praying for those nailing Him to the cross,
as we listen to Him trusting His Father perfectly, even while He suffers the forsakenness of God.
We cannot measure up to this.

It is as Jesus said, **"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."**
Of course, Jesus was speaking about His own up-coming sacrifice that night and the next day.
But realize that Jesus' sacrifice is all the greater, & truly perfect, in that He died, not for friends,
but for His enemies — so that He might call us His friends.
Again, St. Paul, **God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.** Romans 5:8

But this is not just a reflection of Jesus, but the whole of the Triune God.
Like Father, like Son. "The fruit doesn't fall far from the tree" as they say.
and in this case, Jesus' love is a perfect display of the loving nature of God.

Last week on the Feast of Pentecost, Pr. Sparley pointed out that the Christian Church year
has 3 high feast days: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.
In these 3 feasts, we are annually reminded of the love of our gracious Creator, Redeemer, & Sanctifier.
At Christmas, the Father **so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son** to suffer & die for us.

At Easter, the Son showed not just “greater” love, but the Greatest love when He **laid down His life for His friends** (& even His enemies) and took His life up again, thus securing our eternal redemption.

& at Pentecost, the Father and the Son lovingly sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, upon the Church to *call, gather, enlighten, sanctify, and keep us with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.*

The Lord does not expect (nor did He ever) that we would bear any fruit of love apart from Him.

Again St. John informs us in his 1st letter, “**We love because He** (that is God) **first loved us.**” ^{1 John 4:19}

So not only is Jesus the perfect standard of love, but also the perfect source of it, receiving His love from His Father’s nature & sharing that love through the Holy Spirit, even today.

Which means that for us to bear His fruit of love, we need to abide in Him, we need to be united to Him (that is, cherishing your baptism) and draw from His love.

You need His forgiveness for your lovelessness spoken to you regularly so that you can *heartily forgive and readily do good to those who sin against you.* ^{SC: Exp. 5th Petition}

You need His patience so that you may be patient with others around you.

You need to receive His kindness and humility, coming to you in the Lord’s Supper, so that you may share His blessings with those around you in need.

And just as the Father’s love is seen through Jesus Christ and His sacrificial life and death, so Jesus’ love is also seen through your sacrificial life.

Through you, He has chosen to share and display His love in acts of grace and mercy and through the joyful sharing of His Gospel of forgiveness.

But when you fail to show His love to others... when you fail to fear, LOVE, and trust in Him...

Then recount the 10 Commandments yet again and see that the Law perfectly points you to Jesus, not merely as a perfect example, and not only as the perfect source of love, but as the perfect love that your heavenly Father accounts to you,

for Jesus is the Lord your righteousness, The Lord your perfect love.

And know that His love covers over the whole multitude of your sins.

Bless we the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for His great love in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria