

“God Chose You”
The 6th Sunday of Easter – May 6, 2018 – John 15:9-17/B

If you are involved these days in the planning of an extravaganza known as a wedding, you are probably familiar with a website called **The Knot**. It has all sorts of information about decisions that must be made. You can even type in “*Bible verses about love*” and there you would find all three of the texts for today. One can only conclude that, apparently love and marriage go hand in hand. (But we all know that, right?) My evidence of this is almost 30 years of working with pre-marital couples who will answer my first question the same way. I ask, “*Why do you want to marry him/her?*” Roughly 90% will respond immediately, “*I love her/him. He/she makes me happy*” Almost as if happiness and love are the same thing – indistinguishable and intertwined – and, (unfortunately) the decision is made completely separate from God.

Now, if you’ve been doing this married thing for any length of time, you know that love is, sometimes, simply not enough. Which made Pastor Nate’s sermon last week even more important for us to remember: there are different ways to love. Just as each student has a unique learning style, every person from cradle to grave, craves a love that is unique to their heart.

There was even a book a few years back called ***The 5 Love Languages*** which allowed you to take a quiz to find out our preferred way of being loved: for some it is touch, for some, time spent together, words of affirmation, receiving gifts or acts of service. Having spent our Lent picking words to symbolize stories and concepts, what might you think was Jesus’ favorite *One Word* for **love**? In John’s Gospel, there is an obvious answer, for the word **abide** is a hallmark of the Fourth Gospel. Literally, the word abide means *to stay at home, to stay where one is, to not stir*.

Abide appears prominently throughout, but is nowhere more abundant (another of John’s hallmark words) than *on the night in which he was betrayed*, as Jesus lifted a prayer to his Father, and shared his final words with his closest companions. Within that prayer we hear Jesus speaking directly to us, *Abide in me, as I abide in you*. Think about that for a moment. Jesus abides in you. When I envision abiding in Jesus, I see me resting in his arms, drawing comfort and strength there. But how would I picture Jesus abiding in me? What do I see? Can I really imagine Jesus resting in me?

Or is his abiding in me something different? Is it creative? Does he love me differently than he loves you? Does he love me in the same way that I love him? Relationships are shared – and abiding, like love – may be mutual, but it is not the same.

Jesus called us his friends – an elevation over those who were the servants of that time. And yet, to serve God was an honor. I think of the young Mary, responding to Gabriel’s news with the song, Magnificat: “*I am the servant of my God; I live to do your will.*” So while you are labelling your relationship with Jesus as being friend or servant, take a moment to focus on what is even an more important piece of information about you and Jesus: *You did not choose me, I chose you*.

God Chose You. He chose to stay at home with you, wherever you are. Now that is pure grace. Meaning we had nothing to do with that special gift just for you. But why is it that no matter how Lutheran we are, we simply cannot not try to earn God’s favor. When we love, it’s because she makes me happy, or he will be a great dad, or we are a great team, or we come from similar backgrounds. Each of those very valid and very human reasons help us to love. But each expects an appropriate response. It could all be true, yet if there is no choice to live life with and for another, it is difficult to love.

We make a decision to love. Some make a decision for Christ, which really is unnecessary if you believe in God’s grace. For God decided long, long ago to be with you. To love you. Over and

over again – no matter what you do - to choose you. There are a lot of decisions that we make in this life. But the ones we make in relationship with Jesus, are the best, the deepest, the ones that bear fruit – fruit that will last.

You may know the song based on this story that I just found. It's about a pastor who, fascinated with medicine, got a chance to watch an open-heart surgery done by one of his church's members, a cardiac surgeon. The pastor was spellbound as he watched the absolutely amazing process – of the surgeon literally opening the person up and repairing their heart. When the surgery ended, he began to gently massage the heart to get it beating again, but the heart didn't start on its own. The surgeon tried again, still nothing. The pastor became fearful that he might see his friend lose this patient; that he might watch as a person died on the table in front of him. Meanwhile, the surgical team got more aggressive in trying to get the heart going, and still nothing.

Finally, the surgeon knelt down beside his patient, took off his surgical mask and said, *"Mrs. Johnson, this is your surgeon. The operation went perfectly, your heart has been repaired - now tell your heart to beat again."* When he said that, the heart began to beat.

You know, somedays we just forget to let ourselves live. We have experienced so much brokenness and endured so much fear and anger that we've become numb to the fact that God has covered us up with his grace. Sometimes we have to hear someone else tell us to get our hearts beating again, to trust again, to hope again.

So hear me now, people of God. God has chosen you. You are Jesus' home – his abiding place - and he is calling you, by name, to live life in Him. Leave everything else in the empty tomb, and walk into the sunrise of a New Life. Alleluia! Jesus loves you. Amen.

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6th Sunday of Easter – May 6, 2018

Resources: Gary Chapman/*The 5 Love Languages*; David Lose/*In the Meantime*; Beth Quick/*BethQuick.com*; Chris Gerata/*Day One* quoting "Phillips, Craig & Dean - 'Tell Your Heart to Beat Again' Story Behind the Song,"