**John 15:9-17 May 19, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of John the 15th chapter here re-reading these words. “Greater love has no one than this that someone lays 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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

God’s richest blessings to all of the mothers that we have in our midst this morning and I certainly would encourage all of you in Christian love who have the opportunity to reach out and talk to mom on this Mother’s Day to take the time to thank your mother and show her recognition and love. Mother’s Day is a special day and one that I’m sure moms all around the world look forward to but this day wouldn’t really mean anything unless there was a recipient of all of the love that mothers show. Mother’s Day is tied to the bond that mothers have with their children. This relationship is a very special one, it’s one that is unique to each mother and their child. And really, these past few weeks here in our Gospel lessons from John, we’ve been talking about relationships. We’ve been talking about connections, how we connect to God and the type of relationship that we have with God. And the timing of these words of Jesus are important because if we look at the overall context of where these chapters appear in John’s Gospel we’ll see that Jesus is saying these things to his disciples before his betrayal at the hands of Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. He’s explaining to them and illustrating to them the relationship that he has with His Father so that they understand completely why he goes to the cross and dies for them and what his resurrection will mean. This relationship is described as we read last week in the first verses of John chapter 15, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser…..I am the vine and you are the branches.” Jesus is defining and making sense of his relationships.

Which is something that we all do in our own lives but may not necessarily enjoy. Think about it, have you ever sat down with someone, whether it’s your significant other, your girlfriend or boyfriend, your wife, your husband, or a friend, or a family member, maybe even your mother or your father and said the words. “Let’s talk about our relationship”? I’m guessing it wasn’t the easiest conversation to have. These words are found most times are the beginning of the end for many relationships. Because sometimes it’s just easier to let a relationship between two people go undefined. But that’s not how Christ treats us. Look at the detail of His words here in the Gospel of John. “No longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you *friends*.” Now we’ve looked at many different themes and illustrations of our relationship with Christ and with God. In the eyes of God we are His children. We are his enemy. We are sheep in the care of the shepherd. We are soldiers who carry the standard and the banner of the *Lamb* of God who takes away the sin of the world. We are the branches, he is the vine. We are His servants, and now Jesus declares that in our relationship to Him we are his *friends*.

There’s a distinction there. There’s a difference when it comes to family against friends. It’s not something we normally would bring up on Mother’s Day, the day when we celebrate the matriarch of our families and acknowledge all she does for her family, but if we are honest with each other in a very practical sense, family in a lot of ways are the ones that you are stuck with. They’re the ones that have been put in your life whether you want them there or not. But friends are something different. Friends have been defined as the family that you can choose. Friends are special, friends have distinct and unique relationships, some friendships are made on the foundation of competition or common interest. Some friendships are so strong that they take on the comparison of the relationship that brothers and sisters would share. But here Jesus uses the word friend to define another word that is almost always used when we talk about the nature of relationships. Love.

If you call your mother today, as you should if you have the opportunity, at some point in the conversation I would highly recommend that you tell her that you love her. But whether you realize it or not the Biblical meaning of what you are saying in that moment is exactly what Jesus is talking about here. “Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends.” Love is the sacrifice of oneself for the sake of those whom he has a close relationship with. Whom those he considers to be, his friends. That’s the love that Christ shows us, and it’s a love that we in no way deserve. It’s a love that we have not earned in anyway because as Jesus says a few verses later. “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.”

“You did not choose me.” That’s a verse that sadly is forgotten in our day and age. It’s a verse that we sometimes overlook when it comes to God and His Word and His commandments. Because we live in a world where you scroll through an endless supply of entertainment options, where you can pick through a bunch of different types of food on a menu to have the meal that you specifically want. And that sort of mentality has invaded the Church and invaded our own understanding. Because if we are the rulers of our own religious beliefs and if we get to decide what we like and we don’t concerning Jesus and the Bible and our doctrines and beliefs, then it all falls under a false understanding of our relationship with Jesus Christ. This mindset completely undermines the entire focus of our worship, the entire focus of the Holy Scripture that we come to hear and meditate upon, and the entire focus of the sacraments that God has instituted for our benefit. Instead of that focus being on Christ and His work **for us** instead we only want the focus and spotlight to remain….on us. On what we do. On what we’ve done in choosing Christ to be our Savior. On what we care about and what we say. And if we don’t like something, then we feel that we have the authority to throw it out. We want to make ourselves the decider of right and wrong, and in a way, we fall into the same temptation that Satan told Adam and Eve in the garden. We want to make ourselves like God, knowing right from wrong.

We even want to make ourselves believe that we were the ones who chose God, and let God do the marvelous and amazing things that He has accomplished within us. But we don’t let him, he does it on his own. Think about the nature of the relationship that we have with Christ. The sheep don’t “let” the shepherd care for it or defend it, the shepherd already has done those things without the sheep knowing or asking. The branch doesn’t “let” the vine feed it and grow it, the branch is already attached to the vine and relies on the vine. And that’s the nature of our “relationship” with Christ. We don’t choose him, we don’t welcome him into our hearts and into our lives, he is already there. He was always there. From the moment we were formed in our mother’s womb, from the moment we were born and baptized, and educated in the faith and who Jesus is and why he came, he was always there. He had always died for us, whether we recognized it or not. We can’t possibly choose him. But he chose us. And that’s the amazing aspect of this particular section of Scripture. He chose you. He chose you from the sin that covered you. He chose you despite your failing to keep his word and commandments. He chose you and appointed you or set you or put you in a place of prominence in your life where you joyfully get to go out into this world and bear fruit in his name and in thanksgiving for what he’s done for you. Fruit that is the evidence of your faith, faith that clings and receives the gifts that Christ has won for you on the cross before you were aware of it or not.

For Christ chose you and appointed you to a place higher than a slave, higher than a servant, higher than just a face in the crowd or a branch on the vine. What is your relationship to Jesus Christ? The Savior of the world? The promised Messiah and Son of God and God himself? You are his friend. And while earthly friendships can mean many different things from blood brothers who would do anything for each other to mere acquaintances that may interact with each other when they see each other in passing. Or even something as ridiculous in our day and age as considering someone a “Friend” because they have shared their profiles on a social media website like facebook. Jesus tells you what it means that you are his friend. It means that he loves you. And he loves you with a love that has nothing greater than this. That he laid down his life for you. That’s the friendship that you have with Christ, that’s the relationship that you have with God’s own son. He died for you. He saved you. He chose you. And he loves you.

Our relationship with Christ means that the separation of sin between us and the Father is no more. Now we are seen in the eyes of the Father as perfect and righteous clothed in the perfection of our Savior Jesus Christ. Our relationship with the Father is mended and fixed and we now abide in His Word, abide in His love, and one day we will abide and be in His presence for all eternity. These relationships and the proper understanding of them are amazing teaching moments in our lives where we get to see just how blessed and cared for we are. Where we get to see how much Jesus loved us in his monumental sacrifice for us.

If you are blessed to still have an earthly mother with you, thank them for their self sacrificial love and the impact they’ve had on your life. And if you don’t have that chance, remember them today. Find an old photo or call up a living relative who remembers them so you can share stories and remember them fondly. If your mother was blessed to raise you in this faith, then remember them with confidence and comfort and joy that they are experiencing a greater celebration. As we go forward from this Easter season, and as we go forth in our lives, may we never forget the truth of God’s love for us and may we grow in that love every day in our relationship with Christ and in our relationships with one another.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.

Amen.