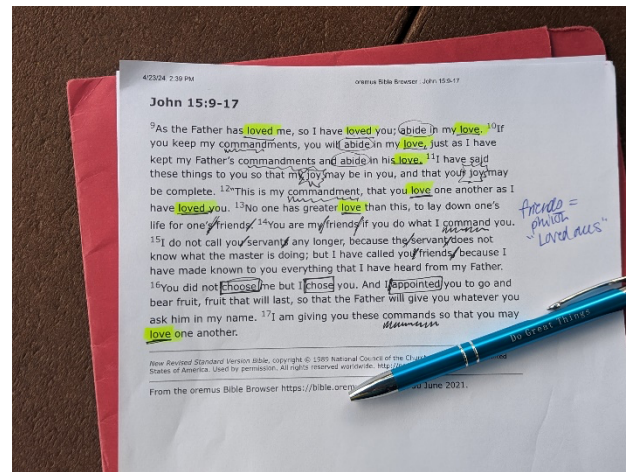


God's grace and peace to you, dear siblings in Christ.

I'm not sure about Pastor John or other preachers these days – but I still like to have pen and paper when I'm studying to prepare a sermon. Maybe I'm old-school, but I like that tactile experience. I like the active engagement with the physical parts of learning. So I circle and underline things as I read and re-read the appointed scriptures.

I write questions in the margins and notes of things to look up. Sometimes I even use highlighters or different colored pens to follow themes, language or repetition through the



story. I was gone for part of this last week -- doing a mission strategy retreat for our Synod's Vitality Team. So before I left, I carefully printed off the assigned scripture readings and my go-to Bible study materials so I could work on it while I was away.

In the quiet of the early morning – before others were awake and our work started, I got my pen and paper out and started to really dig into the scripture. I didn't get very far into my time of study, when it occurred to me that I had made a **big mistake**. Somehow ... I must have mixed something up ... because Pastor John

had just **preached** on what I was **reading**, and all the materials I had prepared to work on ***sigh*** must be for the wrong Sunday. It wasn't until I got in touch with Deanna in the church office – that she set me straight.

I **DID have** the correct scripture passage from the gospel of John – it's just very similar to what we had last week. So, if you heard Pastor John's sermon last Sunday and wondered why we were using the same gospel again today. Let me assure you – this one **is different**. I checked. Several times. Because **I was** confused.

Our scripture passage for **today** follows exactly after the passage we used in worship **last week** – where Jesus says I AM ... (eggo amy for those of you working on your Greek) ... I AM the vine and you are the branches. This section continues both the image of vine and branches and the repetition of Jesus telling us to ABIDE ...

The Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis really helped me, when she wrote “like any good discourse in the Gospel of John, Jesus can't let the metaphor go after only one take.”¹

¹ Karoline Lewis. “Commentary on John 15:9-17: 6th Sunday of Easter.” From WorkingPreacher.org. Accessed 5/2/2024.

She explains “Jesus seems to be repeating himself... but if we are attentive, there are these little nuances that Jesus makes that invite us deeper into the image.

Now we are abiding in Jesus’ love.”²

Jesus tells us to abide in him as if we are the branch and he is the vine.

This kind of connection is a relationship that is both supported and dependent. A branch would be nothing without the vine it attached to. And the vine would be nothing without the root supporting it. When we abide – we make



a home, an **abode**. We settle in. When we abide – we **belong**. We belong to Jesus. We belong to God. And the deeper invitation we are welcomed into -- is to belong **IN Jesus’ love**, and in that way **rooted** in God’s love.

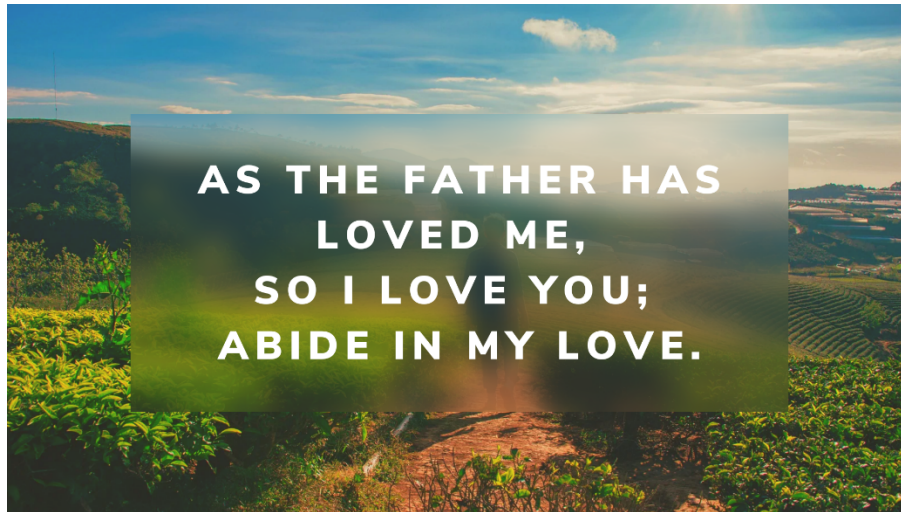
And isn’t this what each of us “ultimately long for?”³ To TRULY belong. To be loved and accepted and welcomed with open arms? Well, dear friends, “This is the promise of God.”⁴ You belong to Christ. God has chosen you - and called you into relationship. You’ve been grown or grafted into this vine of God’s Love. It is a place of abiding – belonging – HOME. Whether this is your first time hearing these words of promise or you’ve never NOT known the power of God’s love in your life. Jesus says these words to you today.

² Karoline Lewis “Sermon Brainwave Episode 963” From WorkingPreacher.org. Accessed 5/2/24.

³ Joy J. Moore. “Sermon Brainwave #963” From WorkingPreacher.org. Accessed 5/2/24.

⁴ Joy J. Moore.

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.”



You **Belong** to a God of Love – roots and trunks and branches and vines are pouring life into each leaf, each bud, each mature branch of this community of believers. **We abide in Jesus’ love.** A love that is lived out, demonstrated, and taught about by Jesus. A love made real in Jesus. A love poured out by Jesus.

This love looked like feeding and healing and teaching. It touched those who were outsiders and offered hope. It was a love of abundance and grace that saw past labels and categories. A love that overcame death itself. Jesus **embodied** this overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love from God the Creator.

We blossom when we **abide** in this love that has drawn us in and has been freely given away.⁵ When we depend on our rootedness in God’s love to move us into

⁵ Meda Stamper, “Commentary on John 15:9-17: 6th Sunday of Easter.” From WorkingPreacher.org. Accessed 5/2/2024.

sharing – into passing along the gift of embodied love. We bear fruit - when we answer the call “to love as Jesus loves.”⁶

This blossoming isn’t an abstract concept or an abstract love. The disciples in John have just participated - in a world-turned-upside-down experience with their teacher and master crouched in servitude washing their feet.⁷ They have experienced firsthand the radical, present, and powerful nature of Jesus’ love. From their witness – from the disciples blossoming – we too, know that Jesus’ love is not simply about talk. Jesus lives and breathes and teaches “Love is an action – [sometimes] a really difficult action.”⁸ It is active, tactile, physical –some might call it old-school -- and expressed in both word and deed among us.

We celebrate that love-in-action today! For this Volunteer Appreciation Sunday we are giving thanks for teachers, leaders, and volunteers. Those who listen, and care, and pray. Those who organize, and witness, and share generously. Those who welcome graciously, who see beyond divisions, who offer a word of hope. We celebrate love-in-action for Clara, affirming her baptism today – witnessing to God’s love choosing her and rooting her in something powerful and amazing.

⁶ Stamper.

⁷ Lewis.

⁸ Emily Askew. *Feasting on the Gospels: A Feasting on the Word Commentary, John Volume 2 Chapters 10–21* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 176.

Thank YOU who share part of your heart, your time, your finances, your gifts & experiences in God's love. You are an embodied witness to a God of Love – who is your root and your source.

Jesus commands us to Love one another with a love-in-action. We've been chosen, appointed, and loved into this reality. **So let us love one another as Christ has loved us.**

May you, beloved, know that you belong in God and share love out of that belonging.

May you abide in Christ's love.

Amen.