

John 15:9-17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give

you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

If you knew you were going to die, what would you do? Do you have a “bucket list” sort of thing? Like stuff you have always wanted to do before you die? Are there places you want to visit, people you want to see, stuff you want to eat? Have you been on the other end of someone else’s preparation for death? Sometimes death occurs very suddenly and unexpectedly and there isn’t anything you can do except grieve and accept what has happened. But, when a person knows they will die, sometimes there is a precious little window of opportunity for the person who is dying to be able to put their affairs into order, so to speak.

Many people never have that chance. What would you want to say to your family and friends if you knew you

were going to die soon? Well, Jesus takes time, on the night of his arrest, to tell His friends how much they mean to Him.

Jesus reminds his disciples that he has chosen them and appointed them to bear lasting fruit. As discussed in last week's sermon, the fruits that they will bear are the fruits of the Spirit —love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. They, like us, have been equipped with specific tools for a specific mission—to spread the message of love and salvation.

This seems cool and all, but think about how incredibly difficult it would be. The context here is that Jesus has been telling His friends for quite a while that He will be leaving them. They do not actually understand all of this. They have been told that He will be betrayed and denied

by some of His closest friends. They have been told He will die but that the temple will be rebuilt in three days. They really don't understand exactly what this means. Then, He tells them that He will always be connected to them like a vine is to its branches. But, most of all, He tells them that they all need to continue to spread the good news of salvation without Him. They will need to take everything they have learned and use it to spread the message of the Kingdom. But, let's look at the situation to see how difficult this could be:

This group of friends were called and Chosen from ordinary lives. Some were spiritually lost at the time they met Jesus. All were asked to give up everything - their jobs, homes, lives as they knew it - to follow Jesus. If you have been watching The Chosen with us, you can picture how hard it has been on the disciples. First, many of them believe that the Messiah came to help them conquer

Rome. They really had no idea what the true mission of Jesus was until much later after meeting Him and traveling around with Him.

Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit.” Jesus is continuing a long tradition that we see throughout scripture - God and Jesus choosing unlikely people to accomplish surprising tasks and the specific mission to spread the message of love and salvation.

Other chosen people in history: Moses, Mary, Joseph, Noah, ... Jesus was doing no different. Fishermen, tax collector, woman from the red quarter, zealot, no religious scholars or church leaders.

The night that Jesus was arrested, there is little doubt that the disciples needed to be reminded that they had been

Chosen. After all they had heard, I am sure they were anxious, scared, confused and predictably sad. They knew one of their friends had just left to betray Jesus. They heard that Peter would soon deny Jesus. Jesus told them that they all needed to love each other. He reminded them to abide Him as He went to prepare a place for them. They needed to be reminded that Jesus had chosen them, not the other way around, even if they didn't understand why. He chose them, out of all people, to continue to bring Jesus into this world and to bear fruit - fruit that would last. And, although they may not have felt confident that they could do what they were being asked to do, they all had one thing in common - Jesus chose them and put His confidence in them. They needed to always remember this, not during the easy times of following Him while He was doing His ministry, but throughout the difficult times - when they were being persecuted, ignored and laughed at, hated, stoned, imprisoned and even killed. Jesus trusted

them to continue His mission - to go and bear fruit for the Kingdom. And He promised them that as long as they would abide in Him, they would accomplish the mission that He chose for them to do.

By the way, to abide in Him means to bear, endure, wait, accept, or remain. In other words, we must **bear** the burdens that we may have to bear when we stand up for Christ. We may **endure** uncomfortableness as we spread the message of the good news. We must **wait** for our rooms to be ready before we can enter into the true presence of God. We must **accept** the words that Jesus spoke. We must **remain** patient and faithful. That is what it means to abide in Him as He abides in us. Think about it - Jesus must bear our sins, endure our selfishness, wait for us to seek Him, accept that we will fail and remain patient with us as He abides in us.

When we choose to abide in Him, we get many rewards. Jesus speaks to his disciples about the importance of love and obedience in their relationship with him and with one another. When we abide in Him, we will get Divine Love: Jesus begins by emphasizing the depth and nature of the love between him and the Father, and how this same love extends to his disciples. Jesus links obedience to his commandments with abiding in his love. He sets an example by stating that he has kept the Father's commandments and remains in his love. This underscores the importance of following Jesus' teachings as a demonstration of love for him.

We will get Complete Joy: Jesus desires his disciples to experience complete joy, and he indicates that this joy comes from abiding in his love and keeping his commandments. Jesus reiterates the commandment to love one another, emphasizing that it should mirror his own sacrificial love. He describes the ultimate act of love as

laying down one's life for friends, which he himself would do.

We will get Friendship with Jesus: Jesus elevates his disciples from mere servants to friends, indicating a close and intimate relationship. He emphasizes that he has shared everything he has heard from the Father with them, highlighting the depth of their connection.

We will get our prayers answered. Jesus assures his disciples that if they bear fruit and abide in his love, they will have their prayers answered by the Father. This underscores the importance of their mission and the effectiveness of their prayers when aligned with Jesus' purpose.

The Command to Love: Jesus concludes by reiterating the command to love one another. This summarizes the

overarching theme of the passage—the centrality of love in the Christian life and community.

Today's gospel comes down to this: it emphasizes the inseparable connection between love for Jesus, obedience to his commandments, and love for one another within the Christian community. It paints a picture of deep intimacy with Jesus, empowerment for mission, and the abundant joy that comes from abiding in his love.

Each and every one of us has been chosen by God for a particular purpose in this world. Why did God choose me? He chose you to demonstrate His character. He chose you that you may know Him and love Him. He chose you because He is love, He is gracious, He is merciful, and He has a glorious plan for you.

We all have moments of doubt, of course. Moments when we wonder what in the world we are doing with our lives; what on Earth we are really here for. But then we just have to hear, re-hear and hear again, “You did not choose me but I chose you.” We have been chosen to bear the fruit of God’s love in this world, and to bear it in such a way that no one else can. And what a time to bear fruit! What an important time for us to be God’s chosen, to bear the fruit of God’s love in this world. Who knows. Perhaps you and I have been chosen by Jesus, to be His disciples, for just a time as this. Our world needs healing. Our world needs help. Our world needs to be reminded of God’s love for us all. If ever there was a time for the church to be the church, it is certainly now. And we are the church. We are the ones that, for whatever reason, God has chosen us for this ask. We are God's surprising choices to accomplish this unexpected task.

So, what do we do? I can tell you that “thoughts and prayers” is not enough! It's important that Scripture actually commands us to not just use our words, but to actually help people and serve them,

1 John 3:18 says, "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

People are hurting. Don't just pray about it. Don't just tell them to pray about it. Don't just offer words. Humble yourself to actually serve and help those who are drowning in sorrows, in issues, and in problems. Do not judge but offer guidance and help. That's what Jesus did.

Prayers are powerful but so is unity, community, and connection. Serving is a great way to share God's love and shine the light of Jesus to others. We were chosen to serve. Words are often not enough.

We have been given the opportunity to complete our own “bucket list” before our Earthly lives are over. But it may not include going somewhere, doing some fun thing you have always wanted to do or eating some food you have always wanted to eat. Instead, we have the chance to tell people, before it’s too late, how we feel about them. We may not actually sacrifice our lives for others, but we can offer our time to help clean their house when they are hurt or drive a friend somewhere if they are not able to drive. We can help feed the hungry by donating food to or working at the pop-up pantry. We can help our loved ones during their grieving by having all of our affairs in order and everything planned for us after we pass - if we are able. We can show our leadership by being on a board or being a member of a non-profit organization. We can realize the fact that we can’t change others but can be their light, we can plant a seed, we can be a little piece of Jesus in the life of someone else, not even knowing the effect if

may have. We can show our friends and others how much we love them all the way to the end. Even if we don't know when we will die, like Jesus did, we can still live our lives as if it could be any time. Say I love you. Give the extra hug. Open your heart to listening, helping and serving. You have been chosen. Let that sink in. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for choosing US! Every minute of every day, we need to remember our true mission - to love one another as you have loved us. Our bucket lists should start NOW, no matter how old we are or how close to death we may be. It is never too late to tell our friends and loved ones how much they mean to us. It is never too late to make a difference in someone else's life. Let the fruits of the Spirit shine brightly in us - so brightly that we can help light another person's way. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.