

## SOME LAST WORDS FROM JESUS

John 15:9-17; Easter 6B – 10:30 Confirmation; May 5-6, 2018

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

If you knew you had less than 24 hours to live, what would you say to your loved ones? The most obvious answer is that you would want to tell them, “I love you.” You would want them to know and remember your love for them after you died.

Today’s and last week’s Gospel Readings contain Jesus’ words on the night He was betrayed. In less than 24 hours, Jesus knew that He would be dead and buried, and He wanted to say some last things to His disciples. One of the things He wanted them to hear was that He loved them. **“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love.”** Jesus wanted them to remember His love for them as they grieved His death and was away from them.

I have the feeling when I preach on Confirmation weekend that these could be the last words some of you hear me preach. It is a sad fact that, despite all the promises made by confirmands and the good intentions behind them to remain faithful to God and remain active in their congregation, Confirmation Sunday might be the last time I will see some of you for a long time, and in some cases, possibly, never again. I’ll be here preaching, but some of you will be gone. The joy of this day is always tempered by that realization.

Next weekend and the weeks that follow I will be looking for you in church and at the Communion rail. Some of you won’t be here. Where will you be instead? In the back of my mind on Confirmation Sunday I have the realization that these might be my last preached words to some of you. What I want say to you and the whole congregation gathered here today is that Jesus loves you. That’s what I want you to remember about today. My hope and prayer is that you abide, remain, in His love.

When Jesus says, **“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love,”** it is important that we understand that Jesus’ love for us is much more than a feeling, but an action.

The verse that shows that Jesus' love is more than words or feelings is this: **Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.** Jesus here describes the action of love as dying for friends. The "someone" Jesus means is Himself dying for His disciples and for us. Jesus had said to them, **"I have loved you."** But it wasn't enough for Jesus just to say it; Jesus was about to "do" this loving thing for His disciples by laying down His life on the cross for them.

It is important for us to understand that Jesus' love for His disciples and us is unconditional. Jesus' love for us is based on His Father's unconditional love for Him. **As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you.** This is very much a restatement of what is recorded in John 3:16. **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.** God does not love us conditionally, that is, based on something we might do for Him. God loves us unconditionally based on who He is.

God's unconditional love for us in His Son Jesus is a reflection of what we need from Him because of our sinful condition. Jesus declared His unconditional love for His disciples at the point when He was about to lay down His life for them with the full knowledge that His disciples were about to abandon Him in fear. Jesus loved them despite their lack of love shown to Him, or better yet, because of their lack of love for Him and their desperate need for being saved.

When Jesus exhorts us to **abide in [His] love** He is reminding us that His love remains for us even when we don't love Him in return. Even when we don't show love for Jesus when we run off and do our own thing, abandon the hearing of His Word, choose to sin with no intention of resisting or quitting that sin, receiving God's forgiveness of sins as an excuse for sinning without repenting, or simply despise God's forgiveness by refusing to hear it in the Absolution or eat and drink it in the Sacrament, Jesus still loves us. One of my favorite Scriptures, because it is so comforting to me as a sinner, emphasizes this: **God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Ro 5:8). Jesus exhorts us to abide in this love.

Sometimes I hear people say that Christianity is a religion of rules. Jesus' words today seem to validate this. In the nine verses of our Gospel Reading Jesus uses the word "commandment" or "command" five times, for example: **This is My commandment, that you love one another. Or, You are My friends if you do what I command you.** It sure sounds like Christianity is based on a heavy dose of law. But we would misunderstand Jesus if we think of His commands as laws like the Ten Commandments.

In the previous chapter of John's Gospel, when Jesus began his last words to His disciples before His betrayal and arrest, He used interchangeably the expressions "**My commandments**" and "**My words**" (14:13, 21, 23-24). Jesus' words and commands were about His Father's love for them and the life they had in Jesus, who would die and rise for them so they would not be left in this world like orphans, without family. It is important to understand how the Gospel fits in with Jesus' commands or commandments.

Think of this comparison: Your parents tell you, "Be home by six o'clock for supper." That's a command. But behind that command is this: It's your birthday and your favorite meal will be ready at that time for you to eat, and then you will open your birthday presents. That's good news for you. If you believe that your parents love you and have good things for you to receive from them, you will want to be home at six to get all that.

This is how Christians hear these commands of Jesus. They are expressions of God's love for us in Christ. Without faith we will see them as burdens on us. But with faith in Jesus we see them not as burdens but as gifts from God; we live in God's family as His dearly loved children and love one another with the same love He shows us. This is not a burden, but a loving gift from God.

One of the tasks of parents and pastors in catechetical instruction leading to Confirmation is to prepare the catechumens to receive the Lord's Supper. Every time the Lord's Supper is offered in the Church we hear Jesus utter commands: **Take, eat... Drink of it, all of you... This do in remembrance of Me.** Those are Jesus' commands in regard to the Sacrament. And we can reject them as a burden to obey, or receive them as something unnecessary for our life.

These commands are connected to the promises of God in Jesus. **This is My body given for you... This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.** There is no burden placed on us in those words. Just the opposite: Jesus took the burdens of our sin on Himself to the cross, and gives us His body to eat to save our bodies from sin and death. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to forgive our sins, rose from the dead, and gives us that same blood to drink for life and salvation.

Today we heard from Jesus some of His last words to His disciples before He died and rose for them, words of love about laying down His life for His friends, the love of His Father for Him and for them, the love He commanded His disciples to abide in. Every Sunday in the divine service we hear the last will and testament of Jesus, His Words of Institution of the Sacrament of His body and blood for us. It is His command to distribute His gifts to the Church for our benefit.

Every year at Confirmation I wonder if my sermon that day will be the last words some of you will hear from me. I hope not! If you believe what Jesus says in some of His last words to His disciples, you will want to abide in His words, His commands, but most especially abide in His love for you.

Jesus says: **“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”**

Amen.