Easter 6B 2021

John 15: 9 - 17

Our hearts are heavy with stinging grief at the sudden death of our brother in the faith, Lee. The shockwaves have left trails of bitter tears in our Grace family. We are at a loss. We try to crank out prayers for the Hruska family as the sadness lingers. Too many unanswered questions can challenge our faith as we feebly hold on to what is most lasting and true.

What is most lasting and true is what comes out of the mouth of God. Only the word of God that brings Christ to us, can there be found comfort and peace.

Jesus said: *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you*. (John 15:9a) Is there any doubt that the Father loved His Son? The voice from heaven declared Jesus to be the beloved Son in the Jordan river and on the mount of Transfiguration, with whom the Father is well pleased. The father is pleased with his Son for going all the way to the cross.

The cross is where love happened. Love is not as much a feeling as it is action. The bloody cross of Calvary witnessed the greatest love of all. “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”*

Self-sacrifice is what love does. It is never self-centered. It does not throw others under the bus to sacrifice them in order to save itself. Making others look bad to make me look good, is what we do. It comes naturally to survive in this brutal world. But it betrays who we are and to whom we belong.

God is Love. Love describes the unity of the Holy Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one. In that oneness, there is perfect love.

It is not a love of self but of the other. This love is not static but moves and in moving, seeks to serve others. Jesus is loved by His father for serving us and saving us. In Jesus we see what perfect love looks like. All the love of the Father is concentrated on His Son. All the love of the Son is concentrated on his friends.

God’s friends do what they are commanded. By doing what God commands, God’s friends stay in His love. The last place we look for love is God’s commandments. Commandments have the sense of killing our pleasure by being too restrictive, too authoritarian and high-handed.

Yet Jesus says that love and his commandments go together. He said: “*If you keep my commandments, you will abide (remain) in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”*

How can there be lasting comfort and peace in anything we do? In trying to become God’s friends by loving and keeping God’s commandments, a heavy burden is heaped on us. Isn’t there always one more thing for us to do?

This is what happens when you choose your God by pleasing Him yourself. You will never get God’s yes, or have any certainty that He is pleased with you, in that way. Only death and separation from God results. Separation from God is when you only have yourself. No one else. There is no love in being self-centered.

Love does not begin with us. We try to turn it around and make it all about me. But we did not choose Jesus. He chose us. He chose to die for us when we were still sinners and God’s enemies. In this way, Christ first loved us. He showed the greatest of self-sacrificial love by his cross.

From his cross drips His holy precious blood into the baptismal font. In your baptism there is certainty that you are God’s friend. It is the moment in your life when your self-centered identity was drowned and a holy friend of God emerged.

From his cross drips His holy precious blood into the chalice. There, in the cup of Holy Communion, is found the festal joy of God’s love. God’s love moves you to love as He loves. Love now is on the move to serve others as Christ served you.

Love as Jesus loved you. It is a very different love from the love of the world. It brings people to Jesus. Is there anything more joyous to Jesus? His joy is in his disciples. He has forgiven and loved you so that you can keep his commandments.

Jesus has brought our brother Lee into the fullness of that joy by grace. He chose Lee in holy baptism and now brought him safely home. Is there any doubt whether God loved him or you?

1 John 4:7ff Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.  Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.  In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.  Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.  No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.