

## Remain in God's Love!

If you get separated from a group in a crowd of people, do you know what the best thing to do is? Nothing.

The best thing to do is stay right where you are and let others come find you. If you start moving around, you're more likely to just miss people looking for you than you are to find someone you're looking for.

In that situation, the best thing to do is to stay put and remain where you are, despite many impulses urging you to move out and look elsewhere for help.

The same can be said of our spiritual life.

There is a constant pull inside of us to seek out safety by doing good things to make up for the bad things we may have done, or by trying to find something better, or more inventive to move our spiritual life forward.

But Jesus' direction to his disciples and to you and me is that you are safe where you are. Stay put. Remain in God's love.

This section of Jesus' words from our gospel reading today, immediately follows our Gospel where we heard Jesus describe himself as the Vine and that we are his branches.

We hear him encourage us, *"The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers."*

As Jesus continues with this discourse, he stays on that theme of remaining, staying put. You are where you need to be, because here you are safe.

*"As the Father has loved me, so also I have loved you. Remain in my love."*

God has loved you with the same love that the Father loves the Son. It's a complete, total, uncompromising love that sacrifices all things to bring you back to himself. Because that's what our sin did to us. It separated us from God. It divided us from him.

But then God gave to us the greatest expression of love that one can have: *"No one has greater love than this: that someone lays down his life for his friends."*

This is exactly what Jesus did. Jesus described his work as the Good Shepherd, we now hear again that Jesus' chief loving work was to lay down his life for his friends—he calls us his friends.

Normally if someone lays down their life to save someone else, it's a limited and temporary thing. Someone jumps in front of a bullet and saves the life of one person; someone dives on top of a grenade and perhaps saves multiple lives. But the people saved, be it one or several, will eventually die. Laying down our life for others is always limited, simply delaying the inevitable.

But not for Jesus. When he laid down his life for us, his friends, it had eternal ramifications. Jesus wasn't simply saving us from a premature physical death; he was rescuing us from eternal death. Laying down his life paid for our sin. There are no limits to Jesus' love; there is nothing temporary in the blessings that God gives through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Which is why Jesus is so adamant when he declares, "Remain in my love!"

Because to do otherwise would be to abandon all the blessings that God has given. If we let Jesus take a backseat in our lives, we jeopardize our ability to remain in his love.

Any time I feel guilt over my sins and try to do something good to make up for them, to earn forgiveness, to work off my debt, I'm running head-long outside of the protective bubble of Jesus' love and thus facing my sin on my own.

Anything that makes it so you or I do not remain in Jesus' love means that we will face an unwelcome eternal destination.

So, how does one remain in Jesus' love?

Before we can understand that it's important to remember how we got into the circle of Jesus' love in the first place. Jesus is very clear that this has nothing to do with you and it has nothing to do with me; it has everything to do with him. Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you."

He decided to save us. He died for us. He sent the Holy Spirit through his Word to create faith in our hearts, which brought us from the death of unbelief to a new life lived for him. Everything that we are or have through Jesus is because of Jesus, not us. We did not choose any of this; he chose us and made it happen.

We know the spiritual results of Jesus' work and choosing us. But what are the external results? What is the evidence that Jesus has done all of this for us?

We are branches connected to the vine. Branches that are healthy, that draw their nourishment from the trunk of the vine and bear abundant fruit.

Good works are the evidence of our God-given faith. Good works do not cause Jesus' love, but they are an outward expression that we are staying put in Jesus' love. Being in Jesus' love causes his love to express itself in our thoughts, words, and actions.

Jesus says that the best way to express that love, to express our thanks to him in our life, is by serving each other. In fact, showing love to others is the completion of the love Jesus has given to us.

We know that we can't love in exactly the way Jesus loved, right? Nothing we do or sacrifice for someone else is going to get rid of someone's sins. Nothing we do or sacrifice is going to rescue someone from evil.

But that's not what Jesus is saying. Jesus is not saying to love like he did so that it brings about the same result. That's not only impossible but completely unnecessary—he did it all!

No, when he says that we should love like he does he's speaking about the spirit of that love, the motivation of that love. We do not show love to someone to get something in return. We show love to someone just to love them, to sacrifice for them.

Laying down our life may not, and in fact most often will not be the dramatic, over the top, saving of someone's life by sacrificing your own.

Laying down your life may mean sacrificing the time that you had set aside for something fun that you were looking forward to doing, and instead helping someone in their time of need. It may mean delaying something you had planned, to talk with someone going through a difficult time.

It means using your time, money, energy, whatever, to help someone who has a need. By this you show your connection to your Saviour. In this you show that you remain in Jesus' love.

You can also love each other by doing the opposite. Help your brothers and sisters by telling them how they can love you! Do you need help? Ask for that help!

Is there something someone is doing that is causing you physical problems or emotional distress? Let them know so that they can modify their behavior.

Having these conversations is not selfish; it's loving. Do not assume that someone is doing or not doing something to be unkind, but talk with them. In doing this, you are loving them because in doing this you are making a need known and enabling them to love you better. In this you show that you remain in Jesus' love.

And this goes beyond your family, beyond your friends, beyond your sisters and brothers in faith. This love, this self-sacrificing love can and should be shown to others. The stranger, the neighbor you don't get along with, the person who seems to hate you with no reason.

Your response? Love. Self-sacrificing love. As Jesus had said earlier, "Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"

Remain in God's love that was freely given to you. Remain in God's love by loving like he loves. Remain in God's love because by that love you will be with him forever. Amen.