

Bible Study for Sunday May 9, 2021

Our texts for this Sunday are:

- John 15:9-17
- Acts 10:44-48

Read **John 15:9-17** (NRSV, but consider other translations at <https://www.biblegateway.com/>)

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.

Our culture prizes self-autonomy and personal choice. We might even talk about choosing our religion or even choosing our God. But what difference would it make if you believed deep down that God chose you?

Do you think of yourself as the initiator of your relationship with God, or do you think of God as the one who initiates the relationship? When you are moved to prayer, was that your idea or God's prompting? How is your relationship with God affected when you think of God as one who is not just passively waiting for you, but as one who is constantly initiating, seeking you, and knocking on the door of your heart?

Continuing with this idea of "choosing" vs. "being chosen," think about how this idea might be applied to the life of a church community. What is the difference between choosing and being chosen? How about when someone chooses Shepherd? Did they choose Shepherd or did God lead them to Shepherd? Does that change how we see visitors?

Philip Yancy (*What's So Amazing about Grace?*) writes this: Not long ago I received in the mail a postcard from a friend that had on it only six words, "I am the one Jesus loves." I smiled when I saw the return address, for my strange friend excels at these pious slogans. When I called him, though, he told me the slogan came from the author and speaker Brennan Manning. At a seminar, Manning referred to Jesus' closest friend on earth, the disciple named John, identified in the Gospels as "the one Jesus loved." Manning said, "If John were to be asked, 'What is your primary identity in life?' he would not reply, 'I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, an author of one of the four Gospels,' but rather, 'I am the one Jesus loves.'"

Sociologists have a theory of the looking-glass self: you become what the most important person in your life (wife/husband, mother/father, teacher/boss, etc.) thinks you are. How would your life change if you truly believed the Bible's astounding words about God's love for you? Or said another way, what if you looked in the mirror and saw what God sees? How differently would you view yourself at the end of a day?

The love Jesus puts in us is meant to mold and shape us and He appoints us to be His orchards and fruit stands. How can you and your church be His fruit stand? Why can't a church function without fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness... and forgiveness...?

What is the benefit of practicing something? How do we *practice* love? How does the practice of love build much heartier relationships with others?

How can our church be better at loving and strengthening one another for servicing Jesus? Why don't we all do this all the time? What can you do about this?

How might someone practice "laying down one's life for one's friends"?

Read Acts 10:44-48

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷"Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

How is the message of Christianity radical?

What does this passage say about what the culture at the time was saying about equality?

Who is welcome in the family of God? How do we mean that, or how do we show that?