



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter 6
May 9, 2021

Love Commanded, Love Connected

John 15:9–17

⁹ *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.* ¹⁰ *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.*

¹¹ *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* ¹² *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* ¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* ¹⁵ *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.* ¹⁶ *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.* ¹⁷ *These things I command you, so that you will love one another."*

"This is my commandment," Jesus says, "that you love one another."

"But, Jesus," we reply, "how can You command us like this? I thought You were done commanding people to do things. That sounds like Law to me. Aren't You all about the Gospel?"

"And how can You command us to 'love one another?' That's . . . well . . . I mean, there are some people I like to love. I love my wife and my family. Well, most of the time, anyway. When they're being nice to me. It's a little harder when they're getting on my nerves.

"But then there are a lot of people I don't like to love. People whose politics I can't agree with; people who have different priorities than I do; people who aren't very likeable or lovable. And You want me to love *them*?"

"How can You *command* us to love, anyway, Jesus? I mean, I can't *make* myself love someone, can I? Besides, I only have so much love to go around. I like *some* people, I love *some* people. But, if I'm honest, I have to admit that the ones I love the most are the ones who do the most for me. Pretty self-centered of me, isn't it. I guess I don't have enough love – or the right *kind* of love – to do what You're commanding me to do."

Well, beloved, I know that's true for me. And I suspect it's probably true for you. Are there people you have trouble loving? Are there people you love *most* of the time, but not *all* of the time? Do you think the problem is really their "lovability" or do you think it's actually your own ability to love?



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That's the real crux of the problem, isn't it? Not enough love. And it'll continue to be a problem as long as we look inside ourselves for the source of love. If I look to myself for the resources to do what Jesus commands, I'll never be able to do it. And neither will you.

So how can Jesus *command* us to love one another? What was He thinking? Well, He tells exactly what was He thinking when we look at the rest of this text.

You see, there's an important piece of this passage we haven't discussed yet. Listen to what Jesus adds later in our text: "This is my commandment, that you love one another *as I have loved you*." Did you hear that? "As I have loved you"! That's the key! That's the missing piece of the puzzle! That's the all-important resource we need to do what Jesus commands. "As I have loved you." It's Jesus' love for us. Without that, we will never be able to love each other as Jesus commands. First, Jesus has to love us.

And He does! He has! Jesus has loved us. How do we know that? Listen to what He says: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." And then look what He *does*: He does exactly that – He lays down His life for us! Surely this is the greatest love of all – not some self-love or self-generated love like I find within myself. No, the greatest love of all is the love Christ demonstrated when He laid down His life for us and all people.

Let's think about that love for a bit. Was it because we were so loveable that Christ loved us? Not hardly. "Christ died for the ungodly," Paul says in Romans 5, and we might add, He died for the unlovely and the not very loveable. It's hard to fathom this kind of love, isn't it. It's so unique and pure and unsurpassed. That the very Son of God would come in human flesh, as a man, and love a world of sinners who'd rebelled against Him; that He'd love those who would nail Him to a cross; that He would love a band of fickle disciples who would abandon Him in His hour of need; that He would love a poor excuse of a disciple like me, one who's failed his Lord, his friends, and his family on countless occasions – that's love, my friends. *That* is love! That ought to be the entry in the dictionary – when you look up "love," there ought to be a picture of Jesus there – with His arms stretched out on the cross, laying down His life for His friends. Greater love has no one than this.

In last week's Gospel, Jesus said that He is the vine and we are the branches, and if we're to bear fruit we need to remain in Him. Well, it's the same with love. We can't have it unless we're connected to Jesus. Just as life flows from the vine to the branches, so does love. Jesus is the source of both – life and love. Remain in the vine, beloved, remain in His life and love.

And *that* is how Jesus can command us to love each other – because we're receiving love – divine love – from Him. Love commanded, love connected. What Jesus commands He also supplies. So it's not impossible. We have the life and the love of Jesus flowing through us. We know what love is because we ourselves have received it from Him.



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Love commanded, love connected. Jesus says, “Love one another as I have loved you.” And the connection goes even further. Jesus says, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.” So the connection goes from the Father to the Son to us . . . and then to one another. The Father has loved Jesus. Remember what the Father said of Him at both His baptism and His transfiguration? “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” The Father loved the Son for taking on the mission of saving the world, for going to the cross and laying down His life for sinners. Love from the Father to the Son and from the Son, Jesus, to us, and then from us to one another. That’s how it goes. That’s how it flows.

The command to love doesn’t occur in a vacuum; it comes to disciples who’ve received – and who continue to receive – their life and their love from the divine source, the living vine, Christ Jesus our Lord. We receive, and then we give.

Now do you see how Jesus can command this of His followers? It’s because He gives us what we need to do it. We have all the love we need to know what love is and we’re given an inexhaustible supply with which to love our neighbors.

Love commanded, love connected. Christ commands us to love one another. Connected to Him, we have what it takes to do what He says. In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen