

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on John 15:9-17 on May 10, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb

Series: Words With Friends
Today's Focus: Love One Another

"Words To Love By"



This week my wife shared some exciting news with me. She said, "Guess what I saw today?" And of course, the appropriate response when your wife asks you that question, guys, is always to say, "Oh, honey, I can't wait to hear what it is! What did you see?" And she said, "Our peach tree has blossoms!" You see we planted a tiny little peach tree a couple years ago. Each year it has grown a little more than the last. Each year we've wondered if it would survive the winter. This spring our little tree has its first three blossoms {show pic}. Isn't that exciting? I think so. Because we planted that tree. We've nurtured that tree. Now we see those blossoms and I'm looking forward someday to enjoying the sweet fruit of that tree!

Well friends, last week if you were here with us or you watched online, we heard Jesus talk about our connection to him in a similarly optimistic way. He said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5). In other words, if you are connected to Jesus by faith because he is your personal Savior from sin and death, then what's just going to happen naturally in your life is that you will produce fruits of your faith.

We heard Jesus also say it like this, *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples"* (John 15:8). The way we show people that we have a living connection to Jesus is by the fruits of faith that we produce. No one can read another person's heart. There is no faith Xray or MRI machine. The world can't see our faith. It can only see the fruits of our faith.

So what does that look like? Obviously if you own a vineyard full of grapevines, what do you expect to find growing on those branches? Grapes! And if you have a peach tree in your backyard what do you expect to find on those branches? Peaches. So what kind of fruit do you expect to find in a person attached to Christ by faith? Christ-like fruits of course! In fact Jesus continues the conversation we started last week in John 15 by sharing a few more words with us his friends that help us understand just what this means. Our Savior says,

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

So let me ask you this. If you had to describe in one word what Christ-like fruits look like, what word would you choose? How about “love”? Jesus uses the word “love” or “loved” 8 times in these 8 verses to describe what our connection to God is to look like. That’s why today we’re going to talk about how the words that Jesus shares with us are **Words to Love By**.

I mean we can all talk a pretty good “love game”, can't we? The words “I love you” so easily roll off the tongue. But Jesus tells us first of all to love each other the way he loved us. In other words, to love without demanding anything in return. To love even when someone’s not being particularly loveable. To love them so much that you put all of their needs ahead of your own. And to love them not just with words, but with actions. Completely selfless actions. Lay-down-your-life kind of love. *Show* them that you love them. *Show* your kids that you love them, even when they might not be showing the same thing to you. *Show* your spouse that you love him or her even when you don’t feel all that lovey-dovey in the moment and it would be easier just to emotionally check out. *Show* your mom or your dad or your grandma or your grandpa that you love them. *Show* the people of your church who sit around you every Sunday that you aren’t just here for yourself but also for them. Don’t just let love be an assumption. Don’t just let it be mere words. These are **words to love by**. To show Christ-like love and to do it in ways that are right in line with his commands and how defines what is loving and what is not.

For many of us I’m guessing perhaps the first experiences we had in life of Christ-like love was the love of our mothers. I think of the times my mom took care of me when I was sick, when I would cough on her, when she would clean up the backseat of the car if I get sick while on vacation and showed probably very little appreciation. And that’s just from what I can remember. But what did she have to get out of that? Pretty much just my germs I think. But she showed me Christ-like love anyway. Especially when I was helpless, she was selfless. She put my best interest and my needs over her own preferences and personal comfort. It’s only fitting on Mother’s Day that we take some time to think about the love that our mothers showed us and thank God for all the ways our mothers showed us God’s love. Especially when moms make decisions that are completely motivated by the best interests of their children, they’re showing them Christ-like love even if other people don’t necessarily see it or applaud it as such.

Of course these words that Jesus shares with us today aren’t just about mothers and they hit us all pretty close to home as we realize that none of us have ever quite loved like Jesus. Jesus says, *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command.* “Love each other,” Jesus says. That means putting into practice all the ways the God’s Word describes what love is supposed to look like. It’s not just “love your children” or “love your mother.” It’s not just “love those who have similar interests to you” or “love those who will be of benefit to you.” It’s “Love *each other*.” And all of a sudden that’s not quite so easy anymore, is it? Because “Love *each other*” means actually showing love to the people in your neighborhood, in your community, in your family, and yes also in those in your church family who are by nature unlovable, broken, stuck up and selfish.

I’ve seen the good, the bad, and the ugly regarding this here in our community recently with what’s happened regarding Kayla’s Playground. Our friends from Kayla’s Krew have handled themselves with tremendous grace and patience and kindness towards all. On the other hand, some citizens from our

community have said things like, “I don’t want this playground in my neighborhood because it will disrupt the quality of my life” ... even as they speak in a room where kids in special motorized chairs are hoping to be just be able to go to a park to play with other kids. I’ve heard people say things like, “If you put this playground in that park near our house, this is going to ruin our lives.”

It’s why I’ve had more than one person tell me as the pastor, “Pastor Ben, you’ve got work to do here in Franklin.” Well you know what? Truth be told that work needs to start inside each of us, doesn’t it? There’s work God needs to do in each of our hearts. Because this “Love each other” talk doesn’t just mean when people are on their best behavior. It means even when they aren’t. We can’t “love each other” and stop at only those people who will love us back. We can’t run away from the challenge of showing love just because it might not work out in our own best interests either. Just imagine if Jesus operated with that kind of love where he said, “I love humanity...it’s just people I can’t stand.”

But what does Jesus say, *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”* That’s about the purest form of selfless love this world has to offer, isn’t it? To die in place of your friends. Actual examples of it are extremely rare. But actually Jesus took this one step further. He loved us so much that he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and he laid down his life for us while we were still his hostile enemies. Listen to this. The Bible says, *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). Jesus stretched out his arms, bled out, and died on the cross for the sins of the world even as he was mocked and scorned. His love was all-in, completely selfless, and sacrificial. He didn’t run away when the going got tough in order to take care of himself. His love was for sinners just like me and just like you. Where do we find true love in this world? Jesus says, *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.*

Friends, whether you think you’ve found true love in a wonderful marriage or you’ve found only a broken heart in life; Whether you think you’ve experienced true love in a perfect family with a wonderful mom or dad or you’ve experienced only hurt feelings... each of you has in fact been shown the greatest love imaginable by Jesus Christ, God’s Son. Each of us still gets to see and hear about this greatest of all love as we hear his word, as we remember the gift of our baptism, and as we receive with our mouths his body and blood given and poured out for the forgiveness of all our sins.

I think it’s interesting that the context of John chapter 15 is that this conversation between Jesus and his disciples took place sometime on Maundy Thursday evening. You know what day and evening that is? It’s the same night on which Jesus was betrayed by Judas, one of his closest friends, even after Jesus had humbly washed this disciple’s stinky feet. It’s the same night on which Jesus celebrated Holy Communion with his disciples for the first time during the Passover meal. The same night that was going to lead to his arrest, beatings, flogging, and a brutal crucifixion the very next day. Yet what is on Jesus’ mind at this time as he knows and anticipates all this? What words does he want to share with his friends? **Words to love by.** And for him...words to live and die by.

Do you understand a little more what Jesus means then when he says, *14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s*

business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Friends, these are **words to love by**. And here's why...because there's a big difference between doing something as a slave/servant vs doing it for a friend, isn't there? A slave does things because it's his duty. It's more likely to come from a sense of drudgery. A slave may not even get an explanation, just the expectation that you better do this or else. But a friend? Well that's a completely different kind of relationship. Think what Jesus is saying here. "You're my friend because I loved others perfectly in your place. You're my friend because I died for your sins. You're my friend because I've covered you with my righteousness. You're my friend because everything that my Father has shared with me, I now share with you. You want to know what love is? Study the inspired words of the Holy Scriptures. It's all right there. Everything you need to live a God pleasing life. Everything you need to define what is loving and what is not. So go ahead and *love each other*. But not because you think you *have to* in order to be pleasing to God but because you *get to* now that you already are. Friends, here are my words to love by."

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

Dear Savior Jesus, our best and dearest friend, thank you for showcasing your pure, perfect, selfless and sacrificial love at the cross where you removed the curse of all of our sins. Keep up always connected to you by faith that we might treasure your words...not to want to rewrite them, but to live and to love by them. By the power of your unchanging Gospel, give us free hearts that find obedience to your will is not drudgery but delight. Fill us with the same sense of the joy that you must have had in hearing your Father declare of you, "With you I am well pleased." Help each of us here today to view our relationship with you not as slaves but as friends. And use us Jesus, to show your kind of love to the people of our community. Turn the hearts of people away from themselves toward you, and then outward to each other. May this all be to your Father's glory. All things are possible in your name. Amen!