

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John. It is a continuation of last week's reading, and it is not appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary. It is appointed for The Sixth Sunday of Easter in LW Series B as well as LSB. You may want to review last week's material; the text and your sermon, perhaps even as an introduction to this week's material.

If last week's reading was about staying attached to Jesus, then this week's reading is about what that attachment to Jesus looks like; the fruit that is produced will be characterized by self-sacrificing love. I ended up using the metaphor of an Internet "connection" six years ago to explain our connection to Jesus. This year I used grape and corn plants and trees.

Although the verb ἀγαπάω and the noun ἀγάπη occur rarely in extra-biblical Greek literature, they are used often in the NT, and are proportionally used more frequently by John than by any other NT writer, and they are very prominent in this pericope. It may be just me, it would not hurt to review the different Greek words for "love" and their meanings.

In the American language we also have several different words that might be called "love." The Greek noun "eros" is the origin of English words like "erotic," and has strong sexual connotations. We may refer to erotic literature, for example. The Greek noun "philos" is used in connection with friendship, as when a guy says to another guy, "I love you man."

You might want to brush up on your understanding of modality in the Greek language, particularly the nuances of the subjunctive mood. The English language has three moods; indicative, imperative, and subjunctive. The Greek language has those three and two moods in addition; the infinitive and the participle, but that doesn't concern us here.

Both English and Greek use the subjunctive mood to express uncertainty; the idea that a thing may or may not happen. In English, we will often express that uncertainty by using the word "should," as in "should a home invasion happen..." or "should you find yourself in our neighborhood..." We find quite a few verbs in the subjunctive mood in this text.

According to Voelz, the subjunctive mood in the Greek language is used specially to describe "acts that pertain to the future, and additionally, those about which there is some

uncertainty” (FGG 190). Starting with verse ten and ending with verse seventeen, there are twelve verbs in the subjunctive mood, including five of them in verse sixteen alone.

If, in the example above, there should be a home invasion, which is not a certainty, then there will be a great deal of uncertainty on several levels. If you noticed that I used the word “if” in my hypothetical, then you can move to the head of the class! In the Greek language as well, the subjunctive often is an indication of such an “if/then” proposition.

In *Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, Burton makes reference to what he calls the “The Deliberative Subjunctive,” and points out how the subjunctive mood is often used in the NT like a rhetorical question, the answer to which is obvious. In the English language, that sort of subjunctive may sound like this; should I change the baby’s diaper?

Probably the best definition of the subjunctive mood, one that is borne out by looking at how that modality is used in the NT, is from www.bcbsr.com, whose author says that, “the subjunctive can be said to *represent the verbal action (or state) as uncertain but probable*.” The uncertainty of the subjunctive then is often found in the degree of probability.

As we make our way through this reading, one that has Jesus going subjunctive mood so many times, keep in mind these definitions of subjunctive, all of which capture one of the several aspects of that particular mood. As a matter of observation, we see that not all Christians love other Christians with the same degree, and some Christians are often nasty.

Christians should love one another, and they are expected by Jesus to love one another, and love for one another is very much part and parcel of being a Christian, but such a thing is by no means a certainty, and in too many instances is actually quite doubtful. We observe further that people who are exposed to the Gospel tend to be more loving.

If you are going to talk about good works this week, and you want to use Luther’s famous words about the tree and its production of fruit, you can either read his *Treatise on Good Works* at the Gutenberg Project, or click on this web page for a nice condensation of it.

<http://www.mesacc.edu/~thoqh49081/handouts/luther2.html>

In preaching or teaching this text, like we did last week, we should retain the tree and fruit metaphor that Jesus gave us, a metaphor that well expresses what He wants to say; that it is to be expected – of course – that Christians will bear fruit, like a fruit tree bears fruit – of course – and that this is really no great shakes, but very much a part of whom we are.

If you want to reference, FC, and who doesn’t, then Article II on Free Will and Article IV on Good Works are nice companion articles, and while you are at it, you might want to reference Article III on Righteousness before God. As always, quoting from the Lutheran Confessions is a good thing, but a good thing gone bad if the quote is too long or obtuse.

Textual Notes

9. Speaking to the group, Jesus says that He puts His love for these people on the same level as the love His Father has for Him, saying, “καθὼς ἠγάπησέν με ὁ Πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἠγάπησα – as the Father loved me, I also loved you.” If you are a father, then you know what you would give for your child, and so do all the fathers who are listening to you.

The love that Jesus had for His children – Christians – is like the love of that father for His children, except that the love of Jesus is much stronger, and His love is absolutely perfect. He gives everything, even His life, because that is what is required by His Father to pay for the sins of all people of all times and all places, and He does that willingly, out of love.

Having set the bar high, and having told them of a love that He is currently modeling, He now commands the hearer to “μεῖναι ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐμῇ - remain in that love. The verb is in the form of an Aorist Imperative, a command with emphasis on the *action*; of staying connected to Jesus. It’s one thing to get connected, and another thing to stay connected.

This aorist imperative command will now be followed in the next verse by those verbs in the subjunctive mood; when you remain in the love of Jesus, connected to Him, then of course certain other things will probably, but not certainly follow. Review the meaning of the subjunctive mood, and then explain that meaning in a way that people can understand.

The verb “μένω – to remain” or “to abide” is used frequently in the NT, and almost always in connection with dwelling in a house. The obvious connection here is back to the beginning of this sermon when He talks about the house with many rooms, in heaven. He has already told them where He is going and that in the future they will be living together.

The not so obvious connection is people gathered together in God’s House on Sunday morning, abiding with Him and with one another around the Word. During Divine Service, we get a glimpse into the ongoing heavenly worship, including a “foretaste of the feast to come” in the Sacrament of the Altar. Jesus is dwelling with us today in Divine Service.

In addition to that, to remain in the love of God is to surround yourself with other Christians, who are sometimes a little rough around the edges but generally tend to be loving people. In fact, there are basically two kinds of loving people in the world; there are the Christians and there are those who imitate the Christians, who aren’t actually loving people.

10. Speaking conditionally, He states an if/then “ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς μου τηρήσητε – if you guard my commandments, μενεῖτε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ μου – then you will abide in my love.” That proposition begins with the conjunction “if - “ἐάν,” a conjunction of uncertainty. When we guard the Word, if we guard the Word, then His love remains among us.

We note here, as we have noted before, that the proper verb is not “keep,” but “guard.” The proper word at the time of the KJV may have been “keep,” which was the place where you put your most valuable things to be guarded, but these days to use that word is to give this command an entirely different meaning, and to horribly confuse Law and Gospel.

Combine the “if” with the verb in the subjunctive mood, (τηρήσητε – you should guard) only serves to notch up the uncertainty a level or two. The primary meaning of this exhortation is to keep the Word pure and unadulterated. Among many accusations made of the Lutherans is that you get your doctrine right, but you don’t do anything about it.

That’s a false dichotomy, and simply not true. You have to have your doctrine = teaching right if you want to know what to do. If you don’t have your doctrine = teaching right, then you don’t know what you should or should not be doing. Observe great swathes of Christendom in Europe and America to see what that looks like, and it don’t look pretty.

There are a lot of churches in America, and many of them belong to various church bodies, and they all have their “thing” their niche. Ours niche is to teach the Word of God in its “truth and purity,” to teach what the Bible teaches. When it comes right down to it, there are churches who say that, but we are one of the few (can we say the only one) who do it.

Before conversion, a person does not have free will to decide to become a Christian. After conversion, the Christian has free will to obey or not to obey the commandments, provided that Christian has been taught the commandments in their truth and purity. See the First Petition. If you haven’t been taught thusly, then you need to find yourself another teacher.

A Christian who knows right from wrong does indeed have the option to keep or not to keep “my commandments,” And as is often the case, the option that you choose will have consequences, a concept on which you may have to elaborate, for the especial benefit of some of your younger listeners, for whom the concept of accountability is not familiar.

But they *do* understand instant gratification, and they *do* experience consequences, and if the Christian remains in the Church, the Christian remains in the love of Jesus, and models it. Remove yourself from the Church, and you remove yourself from the presence of Jesus, and removed from being surrounded by people who love you in their own imperfect way.

He points to Himself as the model; “καθὼς ἐγὼ τοῦ Πατρὸς μου τὰς ἐντολὰς τητήρηκα καὶ μένω αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ – as I have kept the commandments of my Father and remain in His love.” We may, Luther notes, keep doctrine pure, but love is a different story. Jesus keeps His doctrine clean, and in a way unique among all men, His love is pure and perfect.

11. He speaks of “Ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν – these things I have spoken to you.” The verb is a perfect tense form, indicating past action with results that endure. He has indeed spoken

much to these men during the three years together, and that time that is drawing to a close. All of those words spoken by Him and heard by them will have an effect far into the future.

Not only will these men themselves benefit in their future from the Word of God that they have heard from the mouth of God, but they will write those words down so that future generations will also benefit from them. To this day, we possess the Word of God to man, through which Word we are given all the knowledge needed about Him and about us.

The reason why He has said what He has said is “ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡ ἐμὴ ἐν ὑμῖν ᾗ καὶ ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν πληρωθῇ – so that my joy be with you, and your joy may be complete.” The effect of those words is that they will experience joy. The joy of Jesus will abide – remain – with them, and if anything is going to bring us joy, is it not the Good News of Resurrection?

That locative preposition is followed by a noun in the dative case, indicating location alongside. The joy of Jesus is not “in” the individual, as most translations – I mean all of them I’m looking at – have it, but “with” the Christian community and Jesus. It is located with you plural, and once more we see Christians at church with each other and Jesus.

The Lutherans get a bum rap from Christians dominated by the Law for not being joyful, which is odd because the Gospel, which brings the only true and lasting joy, is supposed to predominate in our theology. I’m not quite sure what to make of that, but from the very beginning joyless Christians have been a problem, and the mean joyless ones are worse.

12. And now a command, and it’s a very specific and general command; “αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ ἐμὴ, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς – this command I give you; that you should love one another.” The verb translated “love” is “ἀγαπατε” and it is in the subjunctive, not imperative mood. Our love of one another mirrors His love for us all.

Jesus is here instructing us not to do something profound or absurd, but to do a thing that ought of course to be expected of Christians and in some sense come naturally; to sacrifice for one another as Our Lord has sacrificed for us. Recalling our subjunctive discussion; Jesus sees self-sacrifice for our fellow Christians as the norm, not as abnormal behavior.

Go ahead, Christians, make sacrifices for your fellow Christians. It’s what we do. We do it as individuals, and we do it as a congregation, and we do it as a church body. Sometimes we do it with others outside of our church body, and it’s the “Christian” countries – who have perhaps forgotten why – who are the most giving countries, and it’s not even close.

13. Then there’s what might be called the ultimate sacrifice; “μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῇ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ – nobody has greater love than this; than that one should lay down his life for his friends.” The “no greater love” is litotes, an understatement in which something is expressed by the negation of the contrary.

As has been noted before, ψυχήν is more than just one's physical life; it is one's entire self, mind, body, and soul. I will often note to the prospective groom in pre-marital counseling that his part of the deal is that he needs to be willing to die for his bride, and he is usually good with that. A lot of Christians will tell you that they are willing to die for the Faith.

But the prospective groom generally gets uncomfortable when I argue from the greater to the lesser that if that is the case – if he is willing to sacrifice his life for his bride – then he ought be willing to sacrifice other, more minor things; nights out with the boys, fishing trips, and other selfish pursuits. So also the Christian who is willing to die for the Faith.

It's one thing to give up your “βίος,” a one-time act, for Jesus, but to give ψυχήν is ongoing and maybe even harder. It means living a life dedicated to Christ and dedicated to service to God and your fellow man, day after day week after week, probably for many years until you die. Jesus did both, sacrificing self, and ultimately sacrificing life for His friends.

14. Inspiring a hymn to be written, He notes that “ὅμοις φίλοι μου ἐστε, ἐὰν ποιῆτε ὃ ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν – you are friends of me if you should do what I have commanded to you.” I am on record as holding that Christians should be different from other, non-Christian people. Different in the way that they act, and in the way that they talk, and so is Jesus.

In fact, when I meet a person for the first time, I usually pretty quickly get a sense of whether or not that person is a Christian. As we listen to and observe people, it becomes abundantly clear that not all people are the same; Christians do act and speak differently. People will often do things like think, talk, and do in a way that reflects religious belief.

15. Formerly they had only been servants, and He talks about their former status “οὐκέτι λέγω ὑμᾶς δούλους – I no longer call you ‘servants,’” or slaves. The reason why He used to call them that is “ὅτι ὁ δοῦλος οὐκ οἶδεν τί ποιεῖ αὐτοῦ ὁ κύριος – because the servant doesn't know what his master does.” Many times they have wondered what He's doing.

That status has now changed to one of more equality because of their greater understanding, “ὅμοις δὲ εἵρηκα φίλους, ὅτι πάντα ἃ ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς μου ἐγνώρισα ὑμῖν – I have called you friends because all the things I heard from My Father I made known to you.” From the Father to the Son to the Apostles – they wrote it down – to the Apostolic Office.

The servant doesn't have to know what's going on any more than the modern nacho drone needs to know Taco Bell's long-range business plan. Just put this meat and bean mixture into this mass of carbs, add lettuce and tomato for color, wrap it, and put it here. A servant in that day would do what he was told without question, often without understanding.

We are privileged in that we are known by Jesus as His friends, and that because we know Him, we know God. Not all people do know God. Many are like the Greek philosophers Paul found on Mars Hill in Athens, who “spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new,” and yet never knowing God the way that a Christian knows God.

Go ahead and talk about the Natural Knowledge of God and Revealed Knowledge of God. It will help your hearer to understand how and why people worship God outside of Christ. It will further help them to connect the Creator to His Creation, and perhaps even marvel at the wonder of it all, like the often the Psalmists and LW 817 among others do.

16. As if anticipating the Synergism that has overwhelmed orthodox Christianity in America He tells or perhaps reminds them that “οὐχ ὑμεῖς με ἐξελέξασθε –you did not choose me” and then the emphatic “ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς– but I chose you.” This applies in one sense to the choosing of the Apostles and in another to choosing Christians.

He reminds them of what they are well aware; He chose them to be Apostles. They have been singled out in space and time by Jesus to follow Him. He chose them, and continuing to speak to these specific Christians, says “καὶ ἔθηκα ὑμᾶς – I appointed you.” The verb “τίθημι,” is a word that is used most commonly to set something down in a particular place.

More specific than “choose,” the picture painted here by Jesus is one of Him placing each of these men in a particular time and place to do a particular work, sort of like they did last week at both Seminaries. Like The Church does all the time. The most succinct response I give to the question of exactly what a Divine Call is; God working through The Church.

God puts a particular man in a particular place and time to do His work in that time and place. The Apostles were not sent out willy-nilly like an Easter egg hunt, but to a specific place. So were the Pastors in Ephesus and so are pastors today. I was called to specific place eleven years ago, and when I’m gone, God will send them another specific Pastor.

He chose and He appointed for a purpose; “ἵνα ὑμεῖς ὑπάγητε καὶ καρπὸν φέριτε καὶ ὁ καρπὸς ὑμῶν μένῃ – in order that you should go and bear fruit, and your fruit should remain.” Their story is told by Luke in the book called the Acts of the Apostles, and in the annals of the Church’s history, and the true story is still being written even to this day.

And now another purpose clause; “ἵνα ὅ τι ἂν αἰτήσητε τὸν Πατέρα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου δῶ ὑμῖν – whatever you should ask the Father in my name, that He should give it to you.” We note the two verbs in the subjunctive mood, noting also that a fundamental tenet of the Christian religion is that we should ask the Father for things, but not for just anything.

We should ask “as a dear child asks his dear Father,” and that when we do ask for things, the Father gives them to us, or not. The plural “you” once more comes into play here; God will give to the group what the group asks. He makes no such promise here to the individual Christian, but to the Church. That doesn’t mean He doesn’t hear the individual as well.

We will never pray in church that the church wins the lottery, or that this or that person will win the lottery, or about the lottery in any way, shape, or form. In church, we pray for

things that are important, not that God would give us something to destroy us. Perhaps that's a good rule of thumb for praying in your car – what would Church pray for?

17. He ends here with a short, pithy purpose clause that serves to summarize all that He has been saying, “ταῦτα ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους – these things I command you, that you should love one another,” one final time expressing His expectation that this would happen as a matter of course, and for the most part, but imperfectly, it has.

Law/Gospel

Love/Love – John puts it well in his epistle, as he assures us that the essence of sacrificial love does not lie in our own bumbling efforts, but in God. The Law states that we should love God and love one another, and Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments by saying just that. The Natural Man resists sacrifice of self for others, thinking only of self. The life of Jesus was a life that was self-sacrifice at its very essence, culminating on the Cross, where the Father sacrificed the life of the Son, and the Son willingly sacrificed Himself for the benefit of mankind.

No Joy/Absolute Joy – There is no joy in spending eternity in Hell, and for that matter it must be pretty hard to live this life knowing that, at the end of the day, you will be spending eternity in that place of fire. How much better it is to know that eternity in heaven awaits the end of this earthly life. Everything else pales in comparison.

Not Choosing/Yes Chosen – Left on our own, we would still be dead in our trespasses and sins, not born from above by means of water and the Spirit. For reasons that are not at all clear, God has chosen you, by means of water and the Spirit making you alive in Him. This is of His choosing, not mine, and therefore it is more certain.

Sermon Titles

About Fruit and Good Works

Servants and Friends

Hymns

Jesus Loves Me – LSB 588

God Loved the World So That He Gave – LSB 571

Lord Tis Not That I Did Choose Thee – LSB 573

If Your Beloved Son, O God – LSB 568

Blest Be the Tie That Binds – LSB 649

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Mark).
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark..* The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek
Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek
Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University
Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html