

John 15:9-17^{v vi}

Jesus said: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 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. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I 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. You 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. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

^v About the Gospel: John 15:9-17

Today's reading from the discourse on the vine and the branches deals with the disciples' relationships with one another. Jesus' relationship with the Father has now become the model for all believers. The Father and Son's relationship of mutual indwelling is now extended to Christians. The Father's love for the Son is the basis, both in origin and in quality, of the Son's love for the believer.

Believers are to love one another with a love characterized by self-sacrifice. Thus while Christians are still "servants" (v. 15, literally "slaves") of Christ in terms of ministry (see 12:26; 13:14-16), they are "friends" (v. 15) of Christ in terms of intimacy with God. In and through this relationship Christians are appointed to "bear fruit" (v. 16).

^{vi} Reflection and Response

A few simple words from today's psalm unify today's readings: "sing...a new song." That allusion to newness captures the spirit of rebirth in spring as well as God's marvelous surprises. We can almost imagine the jaws dropping as the Jewish believers discover the shocking truth that God's grace has been poured out on Gentiles too.

So it was when God intervened in human history and sent God's Son. As 1 John points out, the important, new

discovery is not that we love God, but that God loves us. For centuries, humans tried to placate angry deities. To some extent, we continue this charade, trying to rack up the brownie points with our church attendance and good deeds. That activity quickly becomes futile because it is essentially self-centered. God's intervention revealed a love so vast it puts our puny efforts to shame. Yet at the same time, God's dramatic action gives our actions a whole new context of meaning.

If we are fortunate, we have met human beings who get involved when they don't really have to. The people who telephone us when we're depressed or visit us when we're ill may have full schedules already. And yet, they call. They take time. And that is precisely what God did. God came. Furthermore, God stayed. And God got involved far more than anyone could have anticipated. God rewrote the whole story of human relationships with the divine. Jesus fell in love with people no one else would look at twice and gave his life for them.

Few if any slaves could inspire such dedication; only friends bring out the best in each other this way. Jesus asks us not to grovel slavishly, but to become new creations every day. In that process, we bear much fruit, astonishing in its variety, its freshness and its endurance.