

**Sunday Sermon**  
**May 6, 2018**  
**John 15:9-17, I John 5:1-6**  
**“Commanded to Love”**

Introduction

In the classic Peanuts comic strip by Charles Schultz, there is a collection of cartoons about lunchtime. In one, Charlie Brown complains day after day because all he has to eat for lunch is a bologna sandwich. His buddy Linus finally asks him, “Well, who is making your lunch, Charlie Brown?” Charlie Brown solemnly replies, “I am.”

Then there is another cartoon where Linus is eating his lunch and he finds a note from his mother that she has placed in the bag.

I always thought that was such a neat thing for a parent to do. In fact, I tried it a couple of times with my children, put little notes in their lunches that I thought were encouraging. I wrote things like, “Hang in there,” or “Give it your best shot,” or “Study hard.”

My kids never said anything about the notes, so finally I asked, “I put some notes for you in your lunch. Did you see them?” “Yeah,” my daughter said, “what was up with those notes? Do you not think I am studying enough?”

Here is what the note to Linus in the Peanuts strip said:

“Dear son, I hope you enjoy and also appreciate the lunch I made for you today.” The note went on, “Did you have a nice morning? Did you volunteer in class as I suggested? Teachers are always impressed by students who volunteer. It is a sure way to a better grade. Remember, better grades will mean a better college.”

Then, “Did you eat your carrots? Proper nutrition is essential to good study. Are you sitting in the sun? I hope so, for a little sun is good, as long as we do not overdo it. Perhaps ten minutes a day this time of the year is about right. “

Then Charlie Brown comes up and asks, “What are you having for lunch?” And Linus answers, “Carrots, peanut butter . . . and guilt.”

I

Now I am sure that Linus’ mother did not mean to put guilt on him just as I did I not mean to put guilt on my children.

And I do not think that is what the writers had in mind in today’s epistle and gospel lessons about love. They do not intend to heap on us a burden of guilt. In fact, the First John passage says just the opposite. It says that the commandments of God are not burdensome for those who love God.

So the question for us is how do we obey the commandment to love one another, to be kind to one another, to care for one another, to not be arrogant or rude or self-seeking or self-serving? How do we do that in such a way that it does not burden us, but rather brings us, as Jesus says, complete joy? How do we do that?

When Jesus commands, “Love one another,” does he know some of the people we have to deal with?

“Remember,” Jesus says, “You did not choose me; I chose you.” When we realize what Jesus means when he says he loves us the same way the Father loves him, we want to abide in that love and let that love abide in us. We want to share out of the love and grace we have received.

And in that way, the command to love one another as God loves us becomes not a burden but rather a privilege.

## II

So the commandment to love one another is one of the more popular verses in all of scripture. Sunday school teachers teach it; posters and stickers say it; pillows are embroidered with it.

Jewish, Christian and Buddhist texts all say it: Love one another. The difference is only our scripture does not just advise it or suggest it. Our scripture, in the words of Jesus, commands it.

With the same force that Moses used when he brought the law down from Mt. Sinai, Jesus commands us to love each other, whether or not we feel like it. Love one another, Jesus commands, as I have loved you. He even commands us to love our enemies.

Jesus says that to love God and to love others is the greatest commandment. That seems strange to us does it not, to be commanded to love? We think of love as a feeling. Have you ever tried to command someone to feel a certain way? To say I command you to stop feeling sad and start feeling happy? If you have tried, you know it is an exercise in futility. Feelings cannot be commanded.

But “remember,” Jesus says, “You didn’t choose me; I chose you.” I have loved you as the Father loves me, and I command you to love others.

When we look at our less than perfect lives and our less than perfect families, it is hard to believe that Jesus loves us, that Jesus chooses us to make this world that God so loves a better place.

But week after week I see it happening here, acts of caring coming from you that feed bodies and souls. You open your hearts, and you follow Jesus’ command, “Love one another, as I have loved you.”

And, as Jesus says, it bears fruit that lasts.

## III

Since my grandchildren live eight hours away, I could not put encouraging notes in their lunches. So I thought as a good grandparent I would give encouraging responses to Instagram posts. “Looking great,” I wrote, “Keep up the good work. Proud of you.”

From my daughter’s teenage daughter came the reply, “Please do not put

comments on my Instagram posts.”

We struggle with how to express our love to each other. We struggle with how to receive love from each other. But regardless of how many notes or posts we may have given or received, how much guilt we may have given or received, the abiding, claiming love of God can move within us and become real in such a way that loving one another is not burdensome but natural, as natural as breathing.

Or, as Edward Markquart says, that when God commands us to love one another it is like God commanding fish to swim or birds to fly or daffodils to be beautiful. God is simply commanding us to be the kind of people that we were created to be in the first place.

### Conclusion

So are we understanding this? That when Jesus says to the disciples, “I have loved you as God loves you, and you should love as I love,” he means love without conditions.

When I was preparing for today, I went to the Internet to research the Peanuts cartoon strips. I wanted to make sure that I remembered them correctly. In the process of looking, I discovered something. Do you know that these days you can order Lunch Box notes? You can order them printed, or you can print them yourself.

You can get them to say all kinds of things. Some like what I wrote for my kids, “Hang in there,” and “Give it your best shot,” and “Study hard.” And then I read some that say, “Just remember it is okay to make mistakes. I love you no matter what,” and “I love you just the way you are.”

Can we love friends and family like that? Can we love strangers, even enemies like that? Can we love the way God loves us, unconditionally? God loves us no matter what. Every single one of us.

When we realize that, when we grasp it, and come to accept it, and let ourselves receive it, then we are abiding in God’s love.

And we find that we want to share out of the love and grace that we have received. And the command to love becomes not a burden. It becomes a privilege. Let us love one another as Christ has loved us.