

*9As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 12"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I 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. 16You 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. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

"How do you think about God?" I asked her.

"I think God is a coward," she replied.

When I asked her to explain she spoke of Jesus, his suffering and death. "I think God was a coward in sending Jesus. If someone needed to die God should have done it himself rather than making Jesus die.

I think she had been listening when we read John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...."

I think she had been listening when we read of Jesus prayer in the garden of Gethsemane: "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will but what you will".

I think she had been listening as we heard Jesus cry out from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

It seemed to her that God the Father was a coward to send Jesus to suffer on the cross. And while I could have talked to her about the Trinity – that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God in three persons I think her question was really more a question about love. If you love someone will you allow that person to suffer? Or will you do everything you can do to save that person from suffering?

Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me so I have loved you, abide in my love." With the same love that God the Father has for God the Son, with that very love Jesus has loved you. Now you and I cannot see behind the

stage to witness first hand the love between the Father and the Son. But when I think of love I think of a glow of kindness and warmth and joy. I think of love as protecting those who are loved from any suffering or harm. But Jesus says, “As the Father has loved me so I have loved you – abide in my love.”

And how has Jesus loved you? He speaks of his love in this way: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends.” We cannot see back behind the stage to witness first hand the love of the Father for the Son. But everything we know of Jesus’ love for us says that Jesus’ love is a love that suffers for those he loves. Not all warmth and glow and kindness, but giving his life - for you.

And now Jesus says to you: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Love one another with a laying down your life for a friend sort of love.

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

I think of the surveys that so many of you filled out last week. Again and again you spoke of the importance of our youth. I have no doubt that many of you would give money to provide classrooms in which they might be taught. I have no doubt that you would give money for the best equipment and materials for their being taught. I have no doubt that you would be glad to pay the salary of a person to devote her time or his time to the youth. But is Jesus speaking of something more than money here? Is he asking for your self - you – given to the youth? When you come to this place might you not only speak to your family and friends but could you take a special interest in young children who are here, teenagers who are here? Could you learn the names of the children in the new families who are here – remember those names, welcome those children with a smile, a greeting? Could you give the best of your time volunteering to help in the schools – could you make a point of learning the names of the children on your street, stopping to speak with them? Could you say a kind word to the young person who waits on you at Burger King or McDonalds?

Who are the children you might bring to Sunday School here? Is there an after-school program in the community for which you could volunteer? Is there a single mother who could use some help with caring for her children?

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

Love is costly yet not without reward. Jesus said, “I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” Jesus calls you to love with a costly love for he knows the joy that is in that love. It is the joy Jesus has in you.

Think about it. Jesus has joy in loving you. Not “the you” that might be or “the you” you can imagine yourself to be but “the you” that you are. With all the weaknesses, all the hard to embrace sharp edges, all the smallness and selfishness that is in you. Jesus has joy in you. And he intends you to have that same joy in others as you love with a costly love.

Maybe God seems a coward to those who think love is about fixing things up and making things easy. But Jesus says the Father’s love for him is what he has shared with you – a costly love that won’t give up.

“Love one another as I have loved you,” he says.