

Having a Heart for One Another

John 15:1-17

From the Supper in the Upper Room to the garden talk with the disciples, Jesus maintained the theme of the disciples learning to care for one another. The "New Commandment" was given after the lesson of the foot-washing. The answers that Jesus gave the disciples' questions after the 3 fold bad news He shared, directed them to believe and trust in God's plan and in God's good intentions for them beyond the present crisis. Obedience and right relationship with God is the way that we demonstrate our love for Him. Love that is real shows up. It does not hide. In all of this there is a straightforwardness. If you love God then you will follow Jesus' commands. You won't be enthused about following Jesus just some of the time. Love, when it is love, is constant, consistent, committed.

To achieve anything of note in our lives we will have to commit. The path to this kind of achievement will usually mean that we will learn to think in terms of process rather than in terms of outcome. If a child sets out to win a gold medal in the Olympics, she is certain to fail. But, if she loves to figure skate and enjoys the practices and the experience of trying again and again to master a new skill until she gets it down then she will no doubt become good at what she does and she might even become skilled enough to compete for that illusive gold medal. But you won't get there because you love gold medals. You can only get there if you love skating.

In the garden, Jesus talked with the disciples about the experience of being able to ask the Father for anything in Jesus' name. He talked about bearing fruit and giving glory to the Father. He talked about sharing His joy so that they could experience it also. He also defined the ultimate love gift as that of laying down your life for your friend as He challenged them to love each other. He even called them His friends now rather than the servants that they had been since they had been obedient to Him and He had by then shared with them everything the Father had made known to Him. The heights that the disciples achieved are not

ours to seek as goals. To be the friend of God in the way that Jesus spoke of this with the 11, would at the very least be presumptuous. But Jesus revealed the path that could bring you to that place and the emphasis must be on the process rather than the outcome.

Abide in Me as the branch abides in the vine, for without Me, you can do nothing. This is the daily experience of living with a consciousness of Christ, of His care for us and for those around us and of the empowerment He gives as we seek to live as he desires. This daily back and forth with Christ, learning His will, confronting our own desires, submitting to His way, trusting Him to meet our needs, whatever they might be. The experience of coming to know within our hearts that God is pleased with us and that we are fulfilling the purpose for which He made us. These are the things which we learn to live for.

When I was growing up in church we used to talk about the call to preach. In the context of church life, the position of the pastor is respected, the experience of preaching is attractive, it probably doesn't look that hard, the pastor is the leader and appears to be the one in charge, he may even appear to be prosperous. If you are in church, who wouldn't want to be the pastor? I can remember meeting a young man many years ago. His life was chaotic and in complete turmoil. He was in his mid-twenties and was either divorced or being divorced. He was struggling with addiction. He may have occasionally attended church in his teens but he had never experienced a period of consistently living for Christ. He told me that he had at one time felt that he was called to preach. It was as if he viewed his life as a choice between the mess that it presently was and the alternative, "I could have been a preacher."

But, becoming a preacher is not just the result of the experience of a call. It is more the experience of a call that is prepared by a process. The process begins with an encounter with God that brings about a genuine turning to God for salvation. We believe that we are sinners and that the only possible hope for us is in the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross, dying there for our sins and then rising on the third day to give us the promise of eternal life. The belief that Jesus is God and that the purpose for our existence is to live in relationship with Him, to

learn His will and to do it. Believing this, you will begin to read the Bible. You will have a desire to be in church and to learn from the Word. You won't look for any reason you can find to miss the message the pastor preaches but you will make sure that nothing keeps you from hearing it. Soon you will be sharing with others the things that you have learned. This may begin informally in discussions you have with friends but soon your zeal for the Lord will be noticed by the church and you will be asked to teach a class or to give a testimony. You will in the process of all of this be confronted by the Holy Spirit over inconsistencies present in your life. While you are saying one thing in the church you are doing something else at home or in business. The power of the Word and the voice of the Spirit will convince you to repent and to change your ways so that soon being a Christian will be experienced by not only what you believe or hold to be true but also by how you live and what you have become like. You are now living for Christ. You are growing in your knowledge of God and in your walk with Christ. This is all normal. This is what experience of becoming a new believer should be like. It is like this for most. If, at this point, a call to preach is experienced, it is now consistent with everything else that is happening in the life of the one so called. Preaching becomes part of a process rather than a desirable outcome that became attractive to a person for whatever reason.

So Jesus set before the disciples the position that they were now to experience. "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you..." For these disciples their fruit would include the New Testament and the Christian Church. Truly this was fruit and fruit that remained. Did they pray in Jesus' name and receive what they asked for? Were their lives rich and full and complete? But Jesus had taught them to focus on the process of being a disciple and this they carried into their future.

Here are thoughts from Frederick Bruner on what it is for us to pray in Jesus' name:

- 1) Help us to appreciate Your being the real root of the matter
- 2) Help us to bear fruit and to bear the cutting back that this will often mean

- 3) Help us to appreciate Your Word that cleansed us and that keeps cleansing us
- 4) Help us to accept Your invitation to make our home with You
- 5) Help us to stick with You
- 6) Help us to take to heart the warnings You give us about the dangers of not sticking with you
- 7) Help us to let Your words make such a home in us that we can ask thoughtful "whatevers" in prayer
- 8) Help us to bear fruit that lasts and so to bring glory to the Father

Notice the process nature of these prayer requests.

Finally, Jesus gave a word to remind us of the key to our spiritual life and to a life that pleases Him. Again, it is all about the process of how we choose to live.

"This is what I am commanding you, Have a heart for one another."