

“A good tip: where to find God’s love” (John 15:9-17)

As the Father has loved me, so have I 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Today’s Gospel reading is full of love. What I mean is that Jesus mentions the word ‘love’ so many times in this text. Love of Father, love of Christ, abiding in love, loving one another... love, love, love.

But today we’ll focus only on the very beginning of this Gospel text. On these few words. „**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.**” We’ll try to understand what it means to abide in Jesus love.

These words - they sound beautiful. Elevated language. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. Beautiful. Right? Of course. But what do they mean? They do no good to us, unless we understand what they mean.

„As the Father has loved me...” We can learn from these words that God the Father is the source of love. He is the One where all love has its beginning. Unfortunately there is no way we could comprehend what it means.

True God has revealed Himself as the Trinity. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Three of them. Yes. But at the same time One God. One eternal God. The One who created the heavens and the earth, all that there is, things visible and invisible.

The One who holds all together and who has promised to renew the whole creation. We simply can’t comprehend it. All human wisdom gathered together cannot get us even a bit closer to this ultimate mystery whom we call God.

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.” We can learn that love is what defines relationships within the Trinity. Before the creation of time and space, before anything else existed God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit were bound by mutual love. Eternally.

I know. For us these are only words. We can't comprehend any of these. Neither what it means to exist before time and space, not what love means among the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

To show us a beam of their love, God the Son became one of us, so that He could reveal to us what God's love to you is like. That's why John in the beginning of His gospel account emphasized that no one has ever seen God, but the only begotten Son has made Him know to us.

Dr Martin Luther used to repeat again and again that we can know only one God, that is - the man Jesus Christ. He is the only way we can access God, the only way we can know for sure about God's attitude to us. 'I don't know any other God, but the man Jesus Christ.'

In Jesus love to us you can see what the Father's love to the Son is like. This is God's love to you, that He laid down His life for you. That He took upon Himself all yours sins, everything that you have ever thought, said and done wrong, and everything that you will ever do wrong.

He stepped in your place and said: „These are my sins, my hateful words, my evil thoughts, my twisted desires, that is my guilt.” He died the death which you deserve. He gives you His life, so that you can live.

It is an exchange which doesn't make much sense in our world. Why would someone do it for you? But, there are a few relationships in which even we would be ready to lay down our lives for the sake of others.

The most obvious would be parents and children. To great extent parents give up their lives to love their children, to raise them, to care for them. And if there was a need most of parents would literally give up their lives for their children.

You can't say that it is rational. But it is what love does. You can say that it is the very definition of love. Caring about others more than about yourself.

Besides, it is true about children, that since they are born they do so many things contrary to what parents expect them to do, contrary to what parents teach them, contrary to what is right. Still, most of parents would literally give up their lives for their children if there was such a need.

Love is not rational. It doesn't think 'what is there for me'? It only thinks 'what can I do for you, how can I serve you?' God's love is not rational. It doesn't seek its own good. It seeks the good of others. It seeks what is good for you.

God doesn't love you because you are such a wonderful people. It is not how it works. God does not look at us searching whether He can find nice, decent, lovable people to make them His children and to bring them in His Kingdom.

Not at all. He offers His love to everyone. Especially to those who need it the most. Who are they? Those who deserve it the least. If your life is a mess, if you have managed to screw your relationship, if your heart is full of shameful thoughts, if there is not much good that you have done in your life, if you justly deserve wrath and rejection of others, then hear and know - God's love is out seeking for you.

Yes. It is exactly right. Even and especially if there is not much good, not much worth in you, if you are nothing and nobody in this world, even if no one likes you nor cares for you, for you don't deserve it, God love is looking for you.

We need to understand how God love works. He doesn't choose lovable people. He loves everyone so that His love would purify you and would make you a new creation, as wonderful and lovable as only He can create.

Abide in my love! This is what Jesus invites and commands. Abide in my love and I will create from you something uniquely beautiful. My love will make you a different person, a new creation. Abide in my love!

And we can say 'thanks, Jesus, for your kind invitation! We are happy to accept it... but... wait! What do you mean by 'abide in my love'. Where is it? How can I abide in your love? Where can I find it?

These are very practical questions. Essential for us as Christians. Luther used to phrase it this way: „Where can I find gracious God?“ Where can we abide in your love, Jesus? It is a very practical question.

The apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Rome: „For what can be known about God is plain to them [everyone], because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. (Rom 1:19-20)

Where can we abide in Jesus love? When we look at stars, we can sense the Creator's majesty. We can see it in beautiful sunset, in wonders of His creation. We can stand in awe before the Creator. But is that where we abide in His love?

Stars, of course, are beautiful. Beautiful to watch. Not to live. Can you abide in God's love in this empty, cold and hostile space, where there are no signs of life. We wouldn't last out there even a few minutes. Is this where we can abide in God's love? Unlikely.

Maybe we can abide in God's love in His beautiful creation here on Earth? To some extent we can taste the Creator's goodness when we daily receive His blessings. Light. Warmth. Oxygen. Water. Food. Beauty. All that we need for this life.

Is this where we can abide in His love? His creation comes to us also in earthquakes. In tsunamis. In droughts, in floods, in fires. Is this where we can abide in God's love? Unlikely.

Then may be in the society? Among people? For so many wonderful gifts we receive from people around us. Relationships. Friendships. Support. Love. Fun. True. But, on the other hand, who can hurt us the most and who do hurt us the most?

Right. People. The closer they are, the more they can hurt you. Is this where we can abide in God's love? Unlikely. Then where? Where is this setting where we can abide in Jesus' love?

There is only one setting where you can know God as He truly is, and where you can abide in Jesus' love. And it is... you all know it. It is where Jesus Himself comes to be among you, and to bless you with His gifts.

It is right here, in the Divine Service. For this is where we can know God as He truly is. This is where He reveals and shares His love with you. Let me explain.

The Triune God Himself established the Divine Service and promised that here He will be among you and bless you. He Himself said that in the Divine Service you will know God as your God.

Not simply as someone majestic and all powerful, but as your God. Your God! God who wants to be your God, who wants to love you, how wants you to accept His love, to abide in His love.

Let's reflect on this a little more. How do we begin the Divine Service? In whose name? Yes, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It means that we appeal to His command and promises.

We gather together not according our own initiative, but obeying His command. Responding to His invitation. It means also that what we do in the Divine Service is not what we decide to do, but only what our God has commanded us to do.

What is it? Here comes the really scary and wonderful part. You confess your sinfulness and your sins to your Creator. „I confess to you, that I was born sinful... I confess that I have sinned against you in thoughts, words and deeds... I confess that I haven't done what I had to do... I deserve your wrath and punishment... I justly deserve it.”

Every time when you say it in the Divine Service, you say it in God's presence. Before the throne of judgments. Like on the last day.

We are so used to these words that we often don't even think about what they really mean. But this is exactly what will happen when the Christ returns in His glory. All people will be gathered before His throne.

There will be you, your Creator and your life in all its details. Everything you have thought, craved, said and done. This verbal confession will not be needed any more. Everything will be revealed. Naked... naked truth about who you are.

But then something unbelievable happens. Jesus Christ comes and steps into your place and says. 'I did all of this. This is my life. My sins. My guilt. My shame. And I have already received fully what I deserved.' What you deserve...

So what about you? 'I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you'. This is what happens in the Divine Service. It happens with you already now, so that you can be assured that this is what will happen with you, when Christ returns.

Abide in Jesus love! Hear His forgiveness! There is more. He speaks to you. In a way you can hear and understand. He uses your pastor. We are not worthy that such a high things come out of our mouth, but this is how the Triune God acts.

He reveals His love to you speaking to you, comforting you, teaching you, making you wise, telling about what He has done for you and what He has prepared for you. Cheering you up with His promises. Abide in my love!

And then, then He invites you in His feast. In the feast which begins here, but which is a part of never ending celebration in God's everlasting Kingdom. That is Jesus feast. His holy meal. He is the host. Not we as congregation. Not your pastor.

Jesus is the host. We simply receive what He share with us. His holy and life-giving body and blood given to us in the sacramental form with bread and wine. The same body which He gave up stepping into your place, receiving your death, so that you can receive His life.

Abide in my love! This is where it happens. This is the only setting where you can know God as your God. Where He comes to pour over you His love. Whoever you are. Whatever you have done. Whatever you justly deserve.

Here Jesus gives you His love divine. Here He is your God. Think about it, you have your God. Even if you can see His footprints everywhere in His creation, this is where you can truly abide in His love, and foretaste what He is like and to learn what He has prepared for you in His Kingdom.

We are so blessed to be here. Undeservedly blessed. May the Holy Spirit help you to grow daily to appreciate it more and more, and bring you weekly to abide in Jesus love. Amen.