Text: John 15:9-17

**Introduction**

Preaching from John for me is tough. And I want to make a distinction to explain why I hit a wall. It is the distinction between teaching and preaching. Both can be valuable things. I’m not downgrading either. But teaching is much more straightforward. At least in the classical understanding of it. If you talk with professional teachers today and ed majors, they would disagree with some of the assumptions I’m going to say. But in a classical understanding of teaching the teacher is a subject expert. The students are present to learn. That learning can be anything from simple facts, through methods of analysis and means of evaluation. You can teach in a variety of ways from lecture – what many people thing preaching is – to demonstration – what many people think being a pastor or a professional Christian is about, - to teasing out learning through asking questions. That last one comes closer to what the Ed Majors think of education today. Removing the spotlight from the teacher and putting on the process of learning.

And it might be that, when I think about preaching, that comes closest, but is still a bit off. Because teaching even in that process of learning sense is mostly an intellectual endeavor. Preaching always has elements of teaching. It will engage the mind. But what I reaching for when preaching is an experience of the living Word. If all I’ve done is engaged the mind – without either churning the gut in some way, or activating the will – I’ve talked to the weakest part of us. Call me a cynic, but I’d say that 90% of our actions come from the gut, the emotions and immediate intuition. Tyler Cowen one of the more interesting public intellectuals calls is mood affiliation. And the extent the mind is engaged in that 90% it is to justify the desire of the gut that has gone straight to the will. We can recognize the edges of these. This is when you say “I’m going to do this, and this is why.” The mind might say “maybe you shouldn’t do that” – whatever that might be. And our immediate gut response is “shut up mind, I told you I want justification because I’m already do this.”

That’s why education is hard. Because you are talking to the weakest part of us – the mind. Trying to use the mind to train the gut to desire the right things – and stop jumping to the cookie dough ice and fritos chips of life. Preaching – if it is that experience of the living Word – is addressing the gut, the mind and the spirit. And preaching from John pushes deep into the Spirit or our wills. The text itself is the result of decades of meditation on the events he’s telling. And sometimes the Holy Spirit has simply not taught me that yet.

**Text**

Our gospel text itself comes from John’s telling of Maundy Thursday. The Maundy itself comes from the Latin word *mandatum* from which we get our word mandate. The entire section started back in John 13 with Jesus issuing a “new mandate – a new commandment” – “love one another as I have loved you.” It actually started with Jesus washing the disciple’s feet, which is the object lesson of that love. The LORD or teacher washing the feet of the slave or learner. And that act stands until the great act of love is seen on the cross. But John 13 though 17 is cyclical attempts understand that new commandment.

And our short snippet today invites us to meditate on one chain. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” There are three revelations to ponder in that chain.

1. As the Father has loved me.
2. I have loved you
3. Abide in my love

**Christology**

The easy of those to ponder is the second, “I have loved you.” That is the straight-up proclamation of the text. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.” This is that cross. This is what Jesus has done for all of us. This is what Jesus has done for the world. He has laid down his life to cover our sins.

Now there is a complication in here in that this greatest love is directed toward friends. And that might always be the first question hearing the proclamation. Can that cross really be for me? We might reject it – “I didn’t ask for that.” We might feel unworthy or shamed. We might even just feel like we don’t know enough to accept the friendship. Maybe acquaintance would be better. But Jesus addresses all of these.

“I didn’t ask for that.” Too bad. “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” Jesus chose mankind. Jesus chose sinners. He would not see the sinner die, and so the one through whom all things were made, entered his own creation. If love only comes when you ask, it isn’t love. Love isn’t a commodity we can purchase and sell – like our world attempts to make everything else. The Love of God is for you, because he chose you.

“Maybe acquaintance is more proper.” “All that I heard from my Father I have made known to you.” Jesus did not withhold necessary things. He is the perfect revelation of the Father, the very image of God. And he lived this out before the entire world. These things are written that you might believe. Jesus is not he acquaintance of sinners. Jesus is the friend of sinners. He is your friend.

But what about that feeling that I don’t deserve it. Of course we don’t. That is why it is love. If we deserved love that is just a gift economy. Like that funny commercial running recently. France gives the US the statue of liberty and the president character says “That’s a really good gift. Now we have to give France something. What do they like?” Etsy gets the gift economy. But love is costly. People will spurn it. People will abuse it. But the love remains. The Love of God in Christ remains for you.

**Moral**

Now there are all kinds of troubling things that the therapeutic would yell at me what I’ve just said. And I don’t have the time to get into any of them. Suffice it to say that this is divine love. And none of us are called to die for the sins of the world. Although in the commandment to love one another there will be times.

But I think that is the bridge to think about the third part of the revelation – “abide in my love.” First we are not operating in that gift economy. There is nothing that we can give back to Jesus for his love for us. Second the idea of abide is meaningful. This is not a one time thing. The love of Jesus is something continuous…abiding. We ourselves being sinners will probably float in and out, up and down with the tide of that love. Sometimes almost drown, sometimes wonder where it went. But we are to abide in it. And what does that mean or look like? “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.”

We were chosen in Christ to bear fruit. “And that fruit should abide.” We are not paying Jesus back here. We couldn’t produce that much. But this is what abiding in love means. It looks like the commandments. And being sinners, it looks like repentance. And it looks like faith that however bad we might mess it up, God loves us. And that love abides.

Unlike Shakespeare’s Caesar and the tides in the affairs of men that can only be caught once. If you are alive, today in the day of God’s love. Today Jesus calls you friend. Abide in his love.

**Eschatological**

That leaves the toughest of the revelation to ponder “As the Father has loved me.”

Jesus says that “I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” Our lives of repentance and sanctification are a participation in that divine life. Jesus did this perfectly, we do it imperfectly. But our participation is by abiding in the love of Jesus.

There is also this procession from the Father to the Son and to us. Whether that is the knowledge that the Son heard from the Father and made known to us, or the procession of the law, or the procession of love. This is the way things were made. From the Father to the Son and through the Spirit.

And when we abide in this love. It returns. The fruit is produced which glorifies the Father. The joy is made full…brought to its completion. And that joy is made full in the full number of the saints before the throne. Today we bear fruit. Tomorrow we present it to the owner of the vineyard.

Abiding in the love of Jesus, is abiding in the life of God. That’s the invitation. That’s the living Word. Abiding in love is not easy. It is costly. But it is the fullness of joy. It is what we were made to do. Abide in the love of our maker…forever.