

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
May 10, 2015
Confirmation Sunday**

One Thing Leads to Another

- 1. The love of God...**
- 2. Leads to our loving obedience...**
- 3. Which leads to JOY!**

**Hymns: 610 – 749 – Distribution: 380, 310 –
Closing: 784**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

John 15 –

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

One thing leads to another!

Many a homeowner has found that out in carrying out a home improvement project. Perhaps a married couple has wanted to paint the main bathroom in their house for a long time. As spring comes, they're in the home improvement mood, so they decide to make some plans. They look at some paint samples and discuss colors. After they settle on one, the wife says, "I really wouldn't mind if the towel

racks could be moved off the back wall to the side wall and if we had a little larger cabinet above the toilet. "No problem," says the husband.

She heads out to get the paint and he gets out some tools to remove the cabinet and racks. When he pulls those (and the anchors) out of the drywall, he peeps into the holes with his flashlight and notices the builder never insulated that exterior wall! So when his wife comes home, he suggests he could remove the sheetrock from just that wall, insulate it, sheetrock it, and patch it back in again. Good improvement!

However, when he takes the drywall off, the bottom couple feet close to the shower area is damp. Some further probing reveals the lower area around tub is quite damp and mold is beginning to grow. It must come out. And since the tub/shower unit itself is original and looks dated, a new one certainly would look better. But that wouldn't match the sink/vanity, so that probably should go too.

You know where this is going, don't you? It leads to a gutted bathroom and an entire remodel project. ***One thing leads to another!***

Today on Confirmation Sunday, we see the same principle in action, which our sermon text describes. However, this is not a negative chain reaction that occurs. It is a very positive one, one that we can rejoice in, because it happens in our own lives. And it's something we also pray happens in the lives of the young people who are being confirmed today.

1. The love of God...

We read from John 15:9-17: *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have*

called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”

As we read those words, it would be good to know the setting in which Jesus spoke them. He was in the upper room with his disciples on the evening before he would be crucified. He was sharing his last meal with them, and his last instructions before he went to the cross. He began to teach them about this concept of **“One Thing Leads to Another.”**

Where does it start? Jesus said, “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you... Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*” **It all began with the love of God. It began with him loving them.**

“Love.” It’s been a while since we’ve reviewed the concept and the Greek words for “love” in a sermon. Today would be a good day to explore this concept again. After all, in English we have the one word (“love”) that we overuse to fit many situations. We love:

- Our mother
- Our wife
- Weekends
- Our country
- A sunny day
- Italian food

But not like each other!

The Greek language has a number of words that are used for the concept of love:

- PHILEO – This word, from which we get words like “philosophy” and “philanthropy,” is the affectionate love of friends. It is a fondness and a bond that close friends or a close-knit team might have.
- EROS – This is impulsive love. It is connected to passion, the love of a man for a woman and vice versa. It is a love that is based on feelings and pleasure.

A young man might even be looking at sports cars and have feelings this word would describe.

- STORGE – Family love. This is love such as a parent has for their child. It is the feeling between an authority and one under them. It could even be the word used for a man and his dog!
- AGAPE – **But none of those words is the Greek word used here. It’s a word that you might be familiar with from Bible studies you’ve participated in. This word is AGAPE.** It is a love characterized by this:
 - It is a love that is totally committed.
 - It’s not based on feelings or on an agenda for getting something in return. It just loves. It is selfless.
 - It is shown in action. Do you remember how Jesus demonstrated this on that night in the Upper Room? The gospel of John says, *“Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”* This was a perfect example of AGAPE love.

A fitting example today would be mothers, the selfless, patient love of a mother for her family. It is the love that bears discomfort during almost a year of pregnancy. This love bears pain during delivery. Why would she bear that for one she has not even seen? It’s a love that makes her repeatedly tell her children to wear their coats outside in the cold, to take clean underwear along to camp, and to finish their vegetables. Why? Because she has nothing better she could be doing for herself? It’s a love that gets up early to make sure a decent lunch is taken along and stays up late cleaning up the kitchen and making the bathroom sanitary. When her kids get sick, she isn’t worried about getting sick. She gives hugs and wipes noses. She is one that disciplines and isn’t afraid to say “No” when the situation dictates it. She prays at night with them and

teaches them about Jesus' love through her words and example. She doesn't blow her top when they test her patience because it's not about her. It's about them. That's a type of AGAPE love, that she lays down her life for her family.

Yet we all needed a greater love than even a mother could provide. We needed God's love because we have not loved perfectly, as we were created to do. We have selfishly disobeyed God's commandments, not loving him with our whole heart and not loving others as we have loved ourselves. We have made our own commandments and made our decisions on what's best for me right now, impulsively and selfishly. Even for you mothers out there, you know better than anyone else how you have failed on certain days to love with an AGAPE love that God has created you to exhibit.

That's when we are deeply comforted by our reading as we hear about where it all starts: The love of God for us. Jesus said that his Father loved him. This is reminiscent of his baptism, when the heavens broke open and a voice said, "*This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased*" (*Matthew 3:17*). This love was the same concept that Jesus showed to us sinners. He came to earth according to God the Father's plan to be our Savior. He lived a perfect life of love when we did not. And he very well knew what lay ahead of him. That night he would be betrayed by a false kiss from one of his own. He would be arrested, mocked and beaten. He would be condemned and crucified. In love, he would lay down his life for the sins of the world. He would win your and my forgiveness and salvation. Our Lord has loved us with a love that is not like the stock market, where you might have to check it daily to see how high or low it is. It is a love that is even more constant than your own spouse's or family's love for you. **This is God's perfect, saving love for you in Christ!**

Our confirmands today can be sure of this: They are loved. This is true not only because their mothers are here, along with their dear families. It is true because God has shown his love for them in Jesus their Savior, whom they

have learned about in these past years. And everyone here today can rest assured that they have been loved as well in the same way.

2. Leads to loving obedience...

Remember our theme? "**One Thing Leads to Another!**" What does the love of God lead to? Jesus said, "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love... My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you... You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.*" **The love of God leads to our loving obedience.**

Jesus used some interesting words as he taught them about this concept:

- "Love" – The love of God was to result in the followers of Jesus exhibiting the same AGAPE love to those around them.
- "Obedience" – It was also supposed to result in their obedience to God's commands. This is how they would show their love for the Lord. There are two reasons that a person might say they keep God's commandments. Why they would not curse, swear, steal, lie, hate, covet, worship, respect authority, etc.? One way to look at it is because God's commands it. A believer has to obey God's commands because it is his will and is the right thing to do. But that's not the best reason. The best reason is because God has loved me and saved me! He has served as my Savior and showed great love to me. Therefore, a believer has the natural result that they will want to obey God's commands in return.

Jesus emphasized this when he told them, "*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*" They were not to obey like a Marine Corps sergeant barking in their

ear. Their main motivation was not fear. They lived for their Lord out of love for the One who had loved them. We might compare it with a child bringing their mother breakfast in bed on Mother's Day. Why would they do that? Out of fear? Out of duty? No, out of love for the one that has done much for them. This is why we obey our Lord as well.

- “Remain in my love” – The word “remain” has the overtones of being in a place for a long time. When it refers to time, the sense is that something survives, endures and lasts. When it refers to a place, it can even mean that this is where a person lives. Jesus told his disciples where they were to “live.” They were to remain (live) in his love.

Why is this so hard? Why is it hard to love those around us? Think about the circles of people around you. Why is this so hard in your family at times? When family interaction is stressed out and at a low point, things can get downright ugly. Why might a church have members who don’t love each other or who don’t get along? Why would conflict happen in a Christian congregation?

Part of the reason is because when surrounded by sinners, we can find them difficult to love. We probably would point to that first! We would probably point to the people’s faults, selfishness, and weaknesses. We would probably point to the fact that they don’t deserve our love. We would probably point to things others do, which we judge as disqualifying us from our loving them.

However, the biggest reason we fail to do this is because we operate differently than how Jesus is describing. Loving unconditionally doesn’t come naturally to us. By nature, we’re OK giving of ourselves as long as we’re getting at least as much in return – preferably a bit more.

And what about obedience? Obedience to the commands of God are not the norm of this world. In fact, our confirmation class is going to be bombarded by pressure in their next stage of

life to forget obedience to the commands and will of God and to do their own thing! Every one of us here today has lived with negative influences around us when it comes to the perfect commands of God. But we will not find the proper motivation in the world or in our own sinful hearts. It will only be found as “one thing leads to another.” **It will only come from the love of God for us.**

3. Which leads to joy!

All of this leads to one more thing as “one thing leads to another.” It’s found in v. 11: “*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*” **The love of God for us leads to our loving obedience, which leads to our joy being complete!**

The disciples would have JOY in their Christian lives! Hold it. They would? Joy? That might seem to be contradictory if we think about their lives. These men would be persecuted missionaries. They would be kicked out of town and pursued. They would suffer much for the gospel. They would even be martyred for their faith in Jesus, who loved them. Their joy would be complete?

Yes, it would. They would have great joy. I think of the incident in Acts 5 where the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, had the disciples flogged because of their preaching about Christ, and it says they “*went on their way rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.*” No earthly persecution or misfortune could take their joy away. They knew they were on the right road, the road of salvation to heaven.

If you’ve ever gotten a bit lost on the way to a destination, you know how troubling that can be. In fact, you might be driven to distraction until you know if you’re on the right road and heading in the right direction. You might anxiously scan the side of the road for some sign that will tell you you’re on the right road. Then, when you see that highway sign, you relax. The scenery might not seem familiar at the moment, but it’s OK. You know you are on the right road.

This is the same joy that a person can have as they walk through unfamiliar places in this

life's circumstances to our home in heaven. The church father Augustine said, "Our heart is restless until it rests in you." Knowing we are on the right path with our Savior makes our naturally restless hearts joyful. The hills might be high and the road a bit rough, but we as believers in Christ know we are going the right way. And our joy and anticipation of the destination cannot be dampened. **Our joy is complete.**

What a blessing this is for our confirmation class this morning. At their young age, they have been instructed in the truths of God's Word that have told them about their Savior and his road to heaven. Who knows what lies ahead of them in life? Earthly success? Degrees? Employment? Travel? Sickness? Financial problems? Sorrow? Only the Lord knows. But their joy can always be complete and their hearts may always find rest. For the love of God to them has led to their love and obedience in return, which has led to their joy becoming complete. Jesus even promises that their prayers will be heard and answered.

"One Thing Leads to Another." On this Confirmation Day, how blessed we are to see this in action with a group of young people ready to make their vows of faithfulness to their Lord. And how blessed we are that God has worked these things in our lives too.

May we never stop thanking him with our words and our actions, and may we pray that these young people might always walk through life with him as well. Amen.