



### **Prayer of Confession**

**Gracious God, we confess we have sinned in thought, word, and deed. We have not loved as you command. We have clung to our own desires, failed to observe your commands, and neglected to walk in your ways. Forgive us, we pray, and renew a right spirit within us, that we may be find joy in obedience and peace by your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### **Response**

Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be.  
Set your seal upon my heart and live in me. *Repeat.*

### **Assurance of Pardon**

Hear these comforting words: By the sacrifice of Christ our Savior, God separates us from our sins as far as the east is from the west. Believe the good news of the gospel. Our sins are forgiven. Be at peace. Alleluia! Amen.

### **Time for Young Believers**

#### **Prayer of Illumination**

#### **Scripture Reading**

John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept 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: to lay down one's life for one's 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 so that you might go and bear fruit-fruit that will last-and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

#### **The Morning Message**

Today, being Mothers Day, is all about love. To show our love, we may give Mom, or someone who has been like a mom to us, a beautiful bouquet, or maybe we send her a card expressing our love and appreciation. Maybe we've been on the receiving end of the giving. I have a dresser drawer full of cards I've received over the years. The dresser doesn't hold all of them anymore so now there's a stack in my closet. I bet you have a collection, too. Sweet and serious, funny, wacky. Some of them handmade. All expressions of family life.

Let's hold that image in our minds for awhile this morning and turn it just a little. Let's say we're all on the receiving end of gifts and cards today. We can feel the love all around us.

For the next few moments, I'd like for you to think about giving something back to your family. A card or a letter. Maybe a message via smartphone. On this day that we celebrate families, especially honoring mothers, what is it that must be said? What is love's most important message?

If you think that's too tall an order, we can look to our scripture text today. You'll remember that in last week's gospel lesson, Jesus began what scholars call the Final Discourse. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his friends on several occasions. But, he will not stay. He must, as he says, "Ascend to his Father." So Jesus prepares them for his departure.

In last week's message, we heard Jesus explain his relationship to God and his relationship to his followers. We are to understand that we are included as his followers. The image Jesus uses is three-fold: gardener, vine, and branches.

He identifies the gardener as God, the creator, and the one who tends to the vine: shaping, caring, pruning, when necessary, in order to produce the best fruit. In one of the "I am" sayings of Jesus, for which John's gospel is famous, he calls himself "the vine." He calls his believers "the branches."

Jesus paints a beautiful image, doesn't he? What do you notice? I picture the scene in the morning, the dew still so fresh I can feel it as I walk though a lush, fertile vineyard. I see a long-standing arbor, weather-worn, bearing the weight of vines, all glossy brown, intent on twisting and turning, but carefully trained across the arbor's frame. I see the slim new shoots of branches, their leaves with faces turned up to the warm sun. I don't see the gardener, or vintner, but the signs of his work are evident.

Gardener, vine, and branches. According to Jesus, the whole relationship originates with God—the energy, the mind behind the whole creation. It extends to Jesus, God's Son, then to us.

But the story does not stop there. It continues, because these relationships exist for a purpose. Jesus speaks of that purpose: He speaks of the branches "bearing fruit." This is a metaphor that people familiar with the Old Testament would recognize. When vineyard imagery is used in the Hebrew text it refers to the faithfulness of the Jewish community. Jesus uses it in a new way. "Bearing fruit" emerges here as a way to speak about the works of love that are required of Jesus' believers. We will hear it again in the letters of Paul. We will hear about "fruit of the Spirit" in a few weeks at Pentecost. To bear fruit is the believer's purpose.

In this text Jesus is summarizing the most important message he wants to leave with his friends. He reminds them of the command to love one another as he has loved them. On the last night in the upper room, he demonstrated his love in a dramatic way. He washed the disciples' feet and told them to wash one another's feet. He says, "I give you a new command: love one another."

Jesus says when we love like he loves, this deep, comprehensive love, that originates in God, flows through himself, and makes its way to faithful disciples, his joy will be complete.

Bible scholars say that verse 13 is the most explicit statement in the Gospel of what it means to love as Jesus loves:

*"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."*

Jesus' death is the ultimate demonstration of his love. So, what we have here, these verses of John chapter 15, is the love letter of Jesus, at the end of his life, to his friends and to us.

Let's sit with that a moment. How can we describe such a love? Have we ever witnessed such a love? Is it even possible this side of heaven?

Our next-door neighbors have two grandchildren. Their daughter is a full-time nurse and they have always provided child care for the little ones. One day when their grandson was still a toddler, he tumbled over to his grandmother and held up his sippy cup, which, in toddler language is the sign for "more."

She refilled the cup and when she turned to hand it to him, she found him passed out on the floor, still as a stone. Eyes closed. Limp. She couldn't rouse him. You can just imagine the terror of that moment.

She immediately called for help. Minutes later her husband arrived from work. He beat the ambulance to the house. Baby was revived. It appeared he had suffered a seizure, cause unknown, and was bundled off to the hospital, sirens screaming.

As soon as I could, I headed that way, too. My pastor's badge got me into the ER and right back to the exam room. The scene took my breath away. This little boy, so tiny and pale in that stark white bed, clutching his security blanket, safe in the embrace of his mother, who was in the sure embrace of her mother.

On the end of the bed sat grandfather. He turned toward me as I entered the room. His expression said it all: he would die for that little boy.

I hope they never again experience such a scare. But I do hope they will hold the impact of it in their hearts forever. I hope they will recall it with their grandson as he matures. I hope they will describe it as the moment they experienced love's true power and love's true cost. Love's true joy.

That little toddler is now a healthy long-legged ten-year-old. He loves to ride his bike and shoot baskets in his down time. He likes Mexican food. He teases his little sister when his parents aren't looking. His teacher says he's one of the best readers in his class. As it is for all parents, taking good care of him is a full-time job. But, who would want it any other way? It is a labor of love. Love that bears rich fruit.

I have witnessed your love in the year I have been your pastor. Many of you live in family settings, with more than one generation around your table. Many of you are living with the memory of family around the table. You know the full measure of love. You have lived out stories that are not mine to tell, but, I urge you to share them. Tell your family today what love's most important lessons are. Better yet, write them down. It will be a gift for you as well.

**\*Affirmation of Faith**            The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried.  
He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

**\*Ascription of Praise**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.  
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.  
World without end. Amen. Amen.

**Joys and Concerns of the Church**

**Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer**

## **Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings**

**\*Blessing**

**\*Postlude**

### **Announcements**

Happy Mothers Day! We pray God's blessing on our mothers and all who have been like mothers to us. May you be in touch with your loved ones today and supported by their prayers and ours.

The session will meet next Sunday, May 16.

You may place tithes and offerings in the plates provided on the Communion table. We are refraining from passing them through the congregation per health and safety guidelines.

Elder of the Month for May: John Thomas

Birthdays:

May 2 Donna Thomas

5 Elizabeth Dilley

6 Leslee Cassidy

12 Carson Wilson

13 Renee Lemley

16 Doug Frost

Kim Stooke

29 MacKenzie Cassidy

Dante Angelo Roma

31 Shannon Bates

Anniversaries:

May 2 Jeremy and Mary Ellen Winters

22 Matt and Robin McComas