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**To Know the Heart of Jesus is to Know the Heart of God**  
Psalm 98, Gospel of John 15:9-17  
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There are two words that make a difference in John's Gospel – "Just as." "Just as" is used 31 times in the Gospel of John. John's theology reveals the mutual relationship between God, Jesus and the disciples. Just as God has loved, so Jesus loves. Jesus's love imitates and mirrors God's love. His deep love in the giving of his life for his friends also stems from "just as" – to abide in the love of Jesus is to know within ourselves that we are abiding in that same love which originates in the relationship between God and Jesus. John tells us that Jesus came so that we might experience overflowing life and love. The abiding power of that love in and through us renews and transforms us and the whole of creation. So, we abide in love by keeping the commandment from Jesus to love each other.

In today's reading, Jesus is providing pastoral care to his disciples. They are anxious as they have begun to really hear what Jesus has been trying to teach them. While they still don't fully understand what he is telling them, they can take in the love that Jesus has for them. Jesus is talking about his love for them and the joy that will follow once they have come to understand his ultimate message – that we love each other and continue to do the work that he started – reaching out to those who feel disenfranchised, caring for each other; and treating both neighbors and strangers with care and with love.

Loving one another was not a concept that was the norm for that time, nor was it expressed as openly as Jesus expressed it. By Jesus talking about love, he is reframing for them and for us that whatever we do, we should do it with love as the basis for our living together in community. Love is the hallmark in the Gospel of John and Jesus is helping the disciples learn to mirror the love that God has for Jesus and Jesus has for God, and, that Jesus has for his disciples, and for us. It is concrete, not abstract, because Jesus has shown us how we are to treat others, those who are our enemies as well as those who are our friends. It is the love that we have for one another that will abide with us and carry us through the ups and downs of our lives.

Jesus commands that we do acts of love. In order to do that, we need to be able to love our world, for all its scars, its hurts, its problems. Jesus says, "This I have said to you in love, so that my joy **may** be in you and that your joy may be complete." "May" means we have a choice - we may choose to love one another or not. In this Church, we have made a choice. We have made a choice to love one another, which is not always easy. Despite our differences, we have found ways to come together to our communion table, the greatest example of love. By abiding in Christ, we are also abiding in God. If we follow God's command that we love each other, we know that it leads to building each other up in a way that brings love to the forefront of our lives and through us, love to our world.

When faith and love come together, we find joy that can sustain us over the difficult times in our lives. Joy is a deep-seated sense of happiness that embodies not only our hearts, but our lives, as we seek to work together to make our world a place of welcome and joy. That doesn't mean that we don't face difficulties and problems. It means that when we face those difficulties, we know we are not doing so alone.

So, what does it mean when we love each other as Christians? It is not just a cozy feeling or a warm feeling of caring. It is infused with divine qualities. We make a conscious decision to put ourselves on the line for others. To stand up for them when they are bullied or shunned or feeling unaccepted. It means making sure that justice is done in our corner of the world. Imagine how our world might be if we chose love over hate, love over self-gratification, love over being right, love over, well, everything? As one theologian points out, "Love in this passage is not a psychological state, nor is it anywhere described as an internal quality. Love is an action – a really difficult action." [1]

We are called to love. To be life-giving to a friend. To lay down our prejudices, our fear of the "other." Being members of the body of Christ makes us friends and neighbors. It makes our lives matter, makes all lives matter, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, or color or culture or anything else that is a part of what makes each of us unique creations of God. Jesus gave us the command to love each other as he has loved us. His heart embraced all people, especially those on the margins of society.

This kind of love goes beyond emotions and feelings. Jesus and God are inviting us into love that means serving others, means taking action to ensure justice and kindness. It is a sort of holy pipeline of love that connects us to God, Christ and Spirit.

Abiding in Jesus's love is a sustaining force that makes possible what we do as we seek to move beyond ourselves to help others. Coming to our communion table, seals that love and places it in our heart anew each time we celebrate communion. It strengthens the bonds between us and helps us to help each other as we reflect the love that God and Jesus have for each one of us, to all of those who are our neighbors. We know the heart of God because we know the heart of Jesus and we know the heart of Jesus because we know the heart of God. And, we reflect that love as we seek to do what God has called us to do.

[1] Emily Askew, *Feasting on the Gospels: A Feasting on the Word Commentary*, John Volume 2 Chapters 10–21 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 176.