

May 11 & 12, 2024 – Easter 7 Mother’s Day

John 15:9-17

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

***One thing leads to another!*** Many homeowners have 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. The time comes for the project to begin. 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 drywall from just that wall, insulate 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 this Mother’s Day weekend, 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. 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 also I have loved you...No one has greater love than this: that someone lays down his life for his friends.”** It all began with the love of God. It began with him loving them.

Jesus uses the word “Love.” In English we have the one word (“love”) that we overuse to fit many situations. We love our mothers, our spouses, sunny days, pizza. But not like each other. The Greek language has a number of words that are used for the concept of love. But the greatest word for love is agape, which is used here. Agape love is a love that is totally committed, not based on feelings or on an agenda for getting something in return. It just loves. It is selfless.

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 finish their vegetables or clean their rooms. 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 us 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. How we deserve to be forsaken by God, to be punished by him.

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. I am well pleased with him”** (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 knew very well 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!

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 also I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you hold onto my commands, you will remain in my love...This is my command: Love one another 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 endure.”** The love of God leads to our loving obedience. The love of God was to result in the followers of Jesus exhibiting the same agape love to those around them. Why? Because God has loved them and saved them.

But this is hard to do. And why is it hard to love those around us? Part of the reason is because, when surrounded by sinners, we can find them difficult to love. We could probably point to the people's faults, selfishness, and weaknesses. We could probably point to the fact that they don't deserve our love. However, the biggest reason we fail to do this is because we operate differently than Jesus. Loving unconditionally doesn't come naturally to us. By nature, we're okay giving of ourselves as long as we're getting at least as much in return, preferably a bit more. 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, 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 these things so that my joy would continue to be in you and that your joy would 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 towns and pursued. They would suffer much for the gospel. They would even be martyred for their faith in Jesus. Their joy would be complete?

Yes, it would. They would have great joy. I think of the incident in Acts 5 where the Jewish ruling council had the disciples flogged because of their preaching about Christ, and it says they **“left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were considered worthy to suffer shame 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. And so are we. That same joy, no matter the circumstances, is ours. We have forgiveness for all of our sins. We have God on our side. We have heaven prepared for us.

***“One Thing Leads to Another.”*** On this Mother's Day, we thank our God for the love of our mothers. How precious that is. But mostly we thank him for his love which gives us a love for others, that makes our joy complete. ***“One Thing Leads to Another.”*** We love because he first loved us. Amen.