

## John 15:9-17 - 22<sup>nd</sup> after Pentecost. [28.10.2007] Responding to God's Love!

<sup>9</sup> "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! <sup>12</sup> I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. <sup>13</sup> And here is how to measure it – the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you obey me. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. <sup>16</sup> You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. <sup>17</sup> I command you to love each other. [NLT]

Being loved and accepted - it seems that it is not what everybody experienced as a child. Over and over there are stories of people, who did not have a good relationship - especially - with their fathers. Many feel that they were neglected by their fathers, others that their fathers were so busy with their work that they never got to know a dad.

It is hardly surprising when such people have some difficulty in accepting God as a loving Father - the image of their fathers keeps on intruding into this relationship. And yet, God loves each one of you - not simply like a father loves his children, however imperfectly.

God's love is not just a feeling he has for us - something one can read about, but which somehow is not quite real. God's love is much more than a feeling - it is his doing something as he sent his Son into our world. In Jesus Christ we have God's message of love for all people.

Sometimes this message seems to be just a bit too much - after all, why should God love you; why should he love me? God expresses his love for you by sending the Son whom he loves into our world. The words of the Gospels ring with God's love - with the message of God's caring to the point where Jesus says here, the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends.

That is precisely what he did for us - you know the story. But do you also hear how God loves you? Does it still fill you with amazement that anybody should choose to

die for you - so that you will be spared the pains of death apart from God? God loves you - even if you can't imagine why that should be so, it is a fact documented in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Receiving this love of God into your life - opening yourself to hear him declare his love for each one of us. And then there can only be one way to answer to God and what he has done on your behalf: by

### Responding to God's Love!

Responding to him who has changed us by his love. Realising that he chooses to express this love to us - that he says, You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. I command you to love each other.

God chose you - because he has a purpose with you. He has appointed you to produce fruit. Producing fruit - that does not come about by how much we try, but by the fact that God has put this ability into us, when he chose us to be his people and appointed us to bear fruit.

Once again, this can only happen, as we stay in the presence of our Lord, who has made us his very own people. We often get the feeling that we must work at ourselves, work to change who we are. Yet, all we need to do, is to become what God has appointed us to be.

You are not to be more than God has made you to be. He does not expect anything from you, which he has not already given you. God is not one of those fathers who is never satisfied with the achievements of his children, who never acknowledges what they have done, because it is never perfect.

God does not expect you to be perfect, but to be the person he made you to be. And that is only possible as you receive his love into your life - as you fix your eyes on what he did when he chose you. Can you imagine someone getting a call-up to a national team - and not responding, because they simply can't believe its true.

God has called us - not to his 'national' team, but into his family. He has made us to be his children - and he is our Father. God is a Father we don't have to impress before he accepts us; He is the Father whose approval we must not struggle to get before we know that he loves us. Jesus says, You didn't choose me. I chose you. We were chosen before we could do anything to make God believe that we have something to offer to him.

There are many Christians, however, who have an image of God as a hard task-master; who believe that being a Christian means having to come to Jesus. The message of God's love makes it clear: he comes to you. He comes to be a part of your life. He comes to stand close to you. He does so, because he chooses to do so - because he has chosen you.

Such an incredible love needs a response - to be what his love makes me to be. To believe what his love calls me to be - a new person. A person who is so changed that there is a visible 'fruit'.

It is normally quite easy to see if someone is in love - they speak and act differently. This can change, when their love is not returned - but when you are loved, it changes you. When you are loved and love in turn, you do things you never thought possible - men buy flowers for the love of their life. Those who are in love become much more concerned with how they look, but especially they want to do things to please the person they love.

As one who is loved by God, that is no different. Because you are loved by God, you respond to this love. The way to do this - so our Lord shows us here - is that you / we love each other. It is really as simple - and as difficult - as that. Love each other, as God's love fills you - and do things for each other which will be pleasing to our Father. That may be giving somebody flowers - literally or by what we do to make their day a bit brighter.

Pleasing our heavenly Father - by thinking about we can bring the sunshine of God's life into the life of people around us. That may be by things like the project at Shongweni where orphans are being housed. It may also be, by simply doing small things to please people.

One of the stories we heard at the elders' meeting yesterday spoke about a group of Christians who have a car wash at a mall. When people come to pay for the wash they tell them, 'We don't take money'. When the response comes, 'Who are you?', they say, 'We are Christians, and we just want to show you that God loves you!' Don't tell me that there is anybody here, who is not able to do something like this.

God loves you. Believe what His Word says. It will change you forever.