

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor
January 12, 2025

Title: We Are Part of a Beloved Community

Text: John 15:9-17

Back when I was in college, I decided to go out for the track team. This was new for me; my high school did not have a track team, so I had a lot to learn! One of my new teammates invited me to his dorm room and spent a couple of hours teaching me how to get a good burst at the start line. Coach Wilson pulled me aside at practice and showed me how to pace myself in a longer race. One of my teammates was an Olympic champion. He spent one whole practice observing and encouraging my beginner efforts. I still remember my first “big time” race. I was about to run out of energy when I heard the voice of my roommate in the stands, shouting an enthusiastic “Come on, Belton!” All of this to say: it makes a difference in life’s journey if our community accepts us, weakness and all, and helps us, by example and by teaching, move toward being the fullness of who we are.

That’s a pretty good parallel to the life we live in a church that hears Jesus’ call that we love one another (John 15:12). The commands of Jesus are that we love one another (John 15:17). The last time I checked I had to conclude that sometimes we get that right and sometimes we get that wrong. Is that what you have observed? Is that what you have experienced?

Jesus says that love bears fruit (John 15:16). We might even say that we have been loved so that we can love. Chosen (v. 16). Appointed (v. 16). Commands (v. 17). We have been loved by God so that we can bear the fruit of love.

It is probably no surprise to you that the New Testament words for “love” in these verses are various forms of the word *agape*. This is unconditional, sacrificial love. Go back over this week’s focal text (John 15:9-17) and notice how many times Jesus uses plural words when talking about love. Even words like “you” are plural words—what we in the South would call “Y’all.” How about this translation: “I am giving y’all these commands so that y’all may love one another.” Christ calls us to be in a beloved community—loved by Christ and loved by one another. And out of such *agape*, we reach out to the world. Amen. So be it!

What Someone Else Has Said: In her book *Inspired*, Rachel Held Evans wrote, “We must listen too to Rev. William Barber of North Carolina, who though he struggles with a severe arthritic spinal condition and bursitis in his left knee, has marched and preached for decades on civil rights, pressing upon elected leaders and private citizens alike the moral imperative to ‘shock this nation with the power of love’” (Nelson Books).

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You have loved me, O God, so now I am set free to love others . . . ”

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