

7.30.2017 Trinity 7 (John 15:12-27)

Every now and then my mom will come across an article or a picture in her local paper that she finds so interesting she will cut it out, drop it in an envelope, and send it to me. The postal service is probably something most of us take for granted, but if you think about it, doesn't it kind of blow your mind that with a single stamp and just a few key pieces of information, this envelope finds its way to my front door. When I open the mailbox and find that letter, I don't even stop to consider the fact that for less than 50 cents this letter was picked up, placed in their system, sorted in different facilities, loaded on different trailers, and then finally loaded on the mail carrier's route that brought it to my front door. That's incredible, but the front of this envelope is just as astonishing. On this letter there are only five pieces of information: name, street address, city, state, and zip code. These five simple facts ensure this letter makes it to me, for this information distinguishes me from any other person on this planet, and with the date stamped on it, any person in the history of the world. Seven and a half billion people live on this planet, tens of billions of people have lived and died on this earth, yet five quick and easy facts narrow all that down to just one person.

I bring up this simple, yet amazing truth this morning because a couple of weeks ago, while walking alongside the road, I found this small pamphlet that references twenty-five pieces of information, Bible verses that point to only one Man in the history of the world: the God-man, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This booklet contains twenty-five Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus. It points out prophecies such as: the Messiah will be born Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), that He will be of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), rejected by His own (Isaiah 53:3), betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:2), that He would die for the sins of others (Isaiah 53:1-6), and be raised to life on the third day (Hosea 6:2). There are twenty-five prophecies in this booklet, but it is important to realize that Jesus fulfilled far more than twenty-five prophecies. Some scholars put the number as high as four hundred fifty-six. So, consider this thought: If it only takes five facts to distinguish me from any other person in the history of the world, what are we to think of the hundreds of biblical prophecies fulfilled by our Lord, written

centuries before the day of His Incarnation?

I would suggest a reasonable person must conclude at least two things. First, in fulfilling these prophecies, Jesus Christ demonstrates that He is exactly who He claimed to be, the promised Messiah, the only-begotten Son of God, the Savior of the World. Second, it is His desire that the whole world come to the knowledge of the Truth. God calls out to mankind through these prophecies like He called out to Adam and Eve in the Garden, Moses at the burning bush, and Saul on the Damascus road. The evidence He provides to the world is overwhelming. God is not distant, nor is He hiding from us. God is with us, loves us, and we see in this example that He uses the best and most powerful means to reveal the identity of His Son and the truth of His eternal, sacrificial love for us. He is calling us into a relationship with Him, a relationship that transforms this earthly life and offers the peaceful, blessed assurance of life everlasting.

The sacrificial love of God for man is the focus of our second lesson this morning, for it was the night on which Jesus was betrayed that He said to His disciples as they gathered in the Upper Room, *“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:12-13). On this night, Jesus would be betrayed by one of His own and deserted by all but one of these men he calls friends. Because He is the Omniscient God of the Universe, our Lord knows that He will soon be left alone to suffer the agony of His Passion and to give His life on the Cross, yet He doesn't scold His disciples for the mistakes they'll make, He doesn't give them a taste of their own medicine, and He certainly doesn't think of Himself. Instead, He ministers to them. He shares a meal with them, washes their feet, and speaks comfortable words that describe the unfathomable depths of His great love for them.

If you take a moment to consider His actions, you will see a painfully, beautiful example of the truth that God is faithful even when we are not (2 Timothy 2:13). From the day He called these men to be disciples, our Lord revealed the love of our Triune God toward man through personal ministry, sacrificial service, and unconditional love. As you read through the Gospels,

you can't help but recognize how often they fall short, lack faith, or fail to comprehend what Jesus is teaching them, yet our Lord never stops ministering, He never stops serving, and He doesn't stop loving them (or us) even when we fail miserably. The facts on this envelope distinguish me from any other man in the history of the world, but my address could change tomorrow. This is not so with God, for He is ever faithful. As the prophet Jeremiah declares: *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"* (Jeremiah 3:22-23). We never have to question the steadfast love of God or wonder where to find Him, because our Savior *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8). As creatures, our failures cannot change what is objectively true about our Creator: He laid down His life for His friends.

We did not choose Him, but He chose us, and ordained us that we *"should go and bring forth fruit"* (John 15:16). The fruit we bring forth springs from a life lived in obedience to His command to *"love one another, as I have loved you."* In the context of this passage, we often think of God's declaration of love on the Cross as the manner in which we are called to love one another, but we will probably never be put in the position to physically lay down our lives for someone in a singular act of love. When we consider loving one another as Christ has loved us, we reflect on the agony of His passion and death, but then we must endeavor daily to lay down our lives in loving service to God and man. Husbands, wives, friends, I know that you would boldly and gladly lay down your life for your family or friends if someone were to burst through that door, but what about the daily life, or the daily grind? When the kids are being kids or you've had a tough day. When you don't agree with where your spouse is spending the money or you feel all you do is unappreciated. In those everyday moments, are you willing to bring to mind the way our Lord loved on a daily basis? The way He loved when His family didn't believe in Him (John 7:5), when His disciples lacked faith (Mark 4:35-41), and when His friends abandoned Him (Matthew 26:56). As you reflect on the foundation and pinnacle of God's love manifested on the Cross, remember every other moment as well, and consider the words of our Lord: *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved*

you.”

If you feel too weak to love like that, to love as God has loved you, good, because we are all too weak. We can't live the Christian life or love as God has loved us in our own strength. We must rely on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to love as the Father has loved us. Apart from God, we can do nothing. So, this morning, we rely on what we know to be true. Jesus Christ is exactly who He claimed to be, and He has declared this Truth to the world. God is not distant, nor is He hiding from us. God is with us. He gave His life for His friends, and no matter our failures, He remains faithful. He ministers, He serves, He forgives, and He loves us with an everlasting love. May we hold fast to the Truth, and by His grace, in His strength, and to His glory, endeavor daily to keep His commandment, *“That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”*