

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**  
**May 9, 2021**

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**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Clarksburg, WV**

**John 15:9-17**

“... I have loved you, abide in my love ... I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:9 & 11 N.R.S.V.)

## Finding Joy in Love

Happy Mothers Day to all of our mothers and mother figures out there today. Mothers have a powerful role in the shaping of our lives. We owe so much to them.

It is not easy being a mom. I read a true story about a mother who had a tough day. That night she decided that it was time to lay down the law to her four-year-old daughter. She announced firmly, “Tonight, we’re putting on your PJs, brushing your teeth and reading **ONE** book and then it’s lights out!”

Her daughter looked at her with those big eyes and said, “Mommy, we learned in Sunday school about all the little boys and girls that don’t have mommies and daddies.” The mother’s heart began to melt at her daughter’s appreciation.

Then the little girl said, “Maybe you could go be **Their** mom.” (Dynamic Preaching, 5-9-2021, pg. 8)

It is not easy being a mom. But as we grow older, most of us do learn to appreciate our moms and what they had to teach us.

In our lesson from John, Jesus says, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love.” He goes on to say that we are to love one another in the same way as he has loved us.

Jesus provides a model of how to be a good mother and grandmother, a good father and grandfather, as well as children, siblings, and friends. We love because he first loved us. We forgive because he first forgave us.

The famous German theologian Rudolph Bultmann once said, “Only he who is already loved can love; only he who has been trusted can trust; only he who has been an object of devotion can give himself.”

I find this profound. We learn to love by experiencing love from someone else. We learn to forgive by experiencing forgiveness from someone else. We learn to trust by being trusted by someone else.

I read about a young man named Jermaine who climbed the outside of an apartment building in Philadelphia, all the way to the 15<sup>th</sup> floor. He didn't do this as an adrenalin kick. He did it because his mother who is bed ridden was on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor and the building was on fire. The firefighters had blocked the doors of the building and wouldn't let anyone in. So Jermaine climbed up the outside of the building. He did get to his mother's apartment and he helped guide the firefighters to rescue her.

The fire chief told Jermaine that it was a foolish thing to do and that if he ever did it again, he would be arrested. The chief thought that the firefighters' job was made more difficult rather than helped by Jermaine's efforts. Yet, even he was in awe of the depth and drive of this young man's love.

I am not telling this story to encourage anyone to climb the outside of a tall building or to enter a building that is on fire. If you are ever in that situation, stay out of the firefighters way and trust them to do their job. But I do want to point out that the kind of amazing love that Jermaine showed that day was not born in a vacuum. I have no doubt at all that Jermaine had experienced that kind of love directed at him first. Probably by his mother.

Sadly, not everyone can experience the love of a good mother or father. But God sent his son Jesus Christ, so that we could all experience sacrificial, unearned, undeserved, love from him. No matter who you are or what you have done or not done. God loves you with an unconditional love.

The next thing I want to point out is that Jesus calls us "friends." He says, I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, . . ." That's who we are, friends of God.

As Christians we do not love in order to get anywhere. We love because we have already arrived. We love because that is our identity. We love because in loving we find our true identity and our true joy in living.

One can imagine the coach before a championship game telling his players, "You guys are already champions. That is who you are. It is in your DNA. So go out there and play like the champions you are!"

This might be just a pep talk for the coach. But when Jesus says these words, they are absolutely true. I call you friends! That is who we are. Jesus himself said it!

In urging us to love one another Jesus says, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." Sacrificial love is not about being denied

something. It is about being fully alive. It is a joy to love as we have first been loved by God!

Wil Wilimon writes that, “The most widespread misunderstanding is that which assumes that giving is “giving up” something, being deprived of, sacrificing . . . Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness.” (Pulpit Resources, May 9, 2021, pg. 19).

The more we understand who we are as friends of God, the more freely we can give and love. Jesus said, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

I Peter 2:9-10 repeats this same theme, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priest hood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

I want to share this story as told by Wil Wilimon.

*It was my friend Clayton’s fourth birthday. And because four years old is a very special age, his mother told him that he could have any kind of birthday party he wished.*

*“I want a party where everybody there will be kings and queens,” Clayton replied without a moment’s hesitation. His wish was granted. His mother started to work, creating a score of golden paper crowns, royal blue crepe paper robes with gold lining, and scepters made from coat hangers and cardboard. Then the afternoon of the party came. As the guests arrived, they were delighted to received royal crowns, robes, and scepters. Everyone at the part was either a king or queen. And everyone had a wonderful time at Clayton’s party. All the guests enjoyed cake and ice cream. They had a majestic procession up to the end of the block and back. All looked like kings and queens. All believed they were kings and queens. Moreover, they all acted like kings and queens. They all behaved in a most regal manner.*

*That night, when the guests had all gone home, and when the cake and ice cream had been cleared away and Clayton was being tucked into bed by his mother, Clayton said, “I wish everyone in whole world could be a king or queen not just on my birthday, but every day.”*

Wilimon points out that something like that did happen nearly 2000 years ago at a place called Calvary. We who were nobodies became somebodies. “If we could all believe that, perhaps we could start acting like that.” (Pulpit Resources, pg. 20).

Amen.