



MEDITATION
SCRIPTURE: JOHN 15:9-17
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
Sunday, May 5, 2024, Anniversary Sunday
The Rev. Dr. Marcia Whitney Mount Shoop, Pastor

John 15:9-17

15:9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

15:10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in God's love.

15:11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

15:13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

15:15 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, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

15:16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask of God in my name.

15:17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

The Word of the LORD

Thanks be to God

When push comes to shove
We're supposed to choose love
Love is supposed to win
Love is supposed to spin
All of our pathologies and
Anthropologies, our biologies
And chronologies. The
Ontologies and theologies into revolutions
That change the world
The problem is how love gets
Twisted in the spinning, in all
This talk about love winning,
In all this belief without action
In all this beef with each other that
Gets more traction, more transaction
Than transformation
We'd rather stick with our fears
Our jeers, our leers, all the years
Of hurt and pain, the disdain,
The times we got left out in the rain
Soaked with disappointment and with
That lonely feeling of "you, too?"
The ones with the family glue
With the church ties and the
Solid alibis
The stories that we try to believe
Against our better judgment
The tall tales of the exceptions
We should be allowed to make
When so much is at stake
When love will cost us
When love makes us losers
When love fakes our inner most choosers
In moments of truth to choose
The enemy of love—the push, the shove
Of throwing people away—letting our
Homeostasis hold sway
A loveless familiar wins
Many a day, when love
Means we might give our

SO-called comfort away
Love suffocates in all the
Allocates—of resources, of force
Of all that's a matter of course
In economies like ours—the kind
Of allocating that ends up debating
The profit of things like health,
Well-being, housing, eating, seeing
Our shared humanity
It's insanity when you break it down
That love got lost, drowned out
By the cutting of throats, by the
Dividing of sheep from goats
Love got criminalized by morality
Feigned, that taught us to be ashamed
Of who God made us to be,
And who we love and how to
Arrange the we—the places we are
And are not allowed to be
To be true, to be blue, to be just me and
Just you.
Love's splendor got took,
Got hit square in the heart by
The book—lots of books
The books, the hooks, the crooks
The Bibles, the rivals, all the
Methods of survival
Love can't live by bread alone
By stones and by sticks
By all the dirty tricks
That teach us how to lie
To ourselves about who
And what steals our humanity,
By who and what distorts our
Christianity, about the care
And feeding of our vanity
That cover, that image, that
Masking, that basking in the
Burn of never letting them
See us sweat, by betting our lives

On being able to absorb
The regret that avoiding love
Will beget. The bygone days,
The decisions to pay the price
In order to avoid the sacrifice
That love requires
That means true community
Rewires our synapses, our instincts,
Our habits. Life together changes our
Status. We're not free agents,
We're agents of change—we're
The strange exception to the rule,
The fool enough to believe in
A God who laid down power
To be right here in our
Suffering, our delusion,
Our confusion and refusal
The stubborn kind that
Doesn't mind staying lost
And being bossed around
By the harshest of voices
That tell us our choices
Have always got to feed
The beast of our burdens
Our aversions, our diversions
From the one commandment
That God made the journey to
Try and teach us once more
That love is a power that
Does not cower in the face
Of disgrace, it does not hide
Behind pride
Love is willing to be seen,
To intervene, to lay down
The cultures that get
In between and among us
Weighing us down, miring us in
A loveless kind of loving
That elicits the worst kinds of
Shoving and pushing each other away

Far from the people Jesus told
Us we are meant to be
We are wired to need each other
To be safe in the most nourishing way
We are born ready to love
Ripe for the trust
Fresh from magic of what
God can create out of dust
Out of the unlikeliest dream
That the thing that can break us
Also has the power to make us
Redeem a lost promise, a forgotten
Birthright—true protector from the
Dangers of dominance and might.
Love liberates the hearts we have
Hidden away—the hope that
Tells us maybe today is the day
When love won't hurt as much as
Heal what has been keeping us sick
What's cut down past the quick
Today is the day to take genocide
Out of the equation,
No matter the perpetrator,
No matter the nation,
No matter the cause.
Today is the day to remember
In our bones that love does not divide people
Into camps, cramped and stamped for
Their flag, or their drag,
their god or their body
Their ability, their productivity
This is love's moment
To face the cruel ways we
Turned against God's intentions
This is love's chance for
Radical interventions that can
Stop using pepper spray and
Rubber bullets to rule the day
But that take the time to
Be human together, to open our arms

Instead of take them up against
Students who are calling for
The world to be better
For the world to wake up
From the stupor of nation
And accumulation and superiority
And reclaim love's interiority
In everything that breathes, that lives
That gives itself to this world
With an earnest, beating heart
Pulsing for the love of what
Life has to give
When we work together
To let love live
When pushing and shoving give way
To the beauty of love's longing,
And to the joyful feast of belonging.

Thanks be to God.

Invitation:

This is the joyful feast of belonging
A glimpse of love's longing
For right relationship, for enough,
For mercy, for soft places to land
And for the tender ways we can begin to understand
That God is here when we come together
Despite the fear that we have the power
To hurt each other.
That God is here when we take the chance
To believe that love feeds our deepest hunger
And quenches our most intense thirst for a world
Where there is room, there is mercy, there is
Abundance, and there is true love that
We can taste and see in our life together.