

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Gospel Year B

Hatred Defeated by Jesus' Love

John 15:9-17

Sixth Sunday after Easter

Analysis by James Squire

9As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

12 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I 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. 16You 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 him in my name. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Author's Note: Like the branch that is connected to the vine that is connected to the roots, this text is connected to the text preceding it in John 15. The network connections are crucial. If the roots are strong, the vine will be strong, and therefore the branches will be strong. And the substance that flows throughout is a combination of love (v. 9) and joy (v. 11). Jesus' commandment is likened to the Creator's commandment

built into nature, the kind where God declares: “It is good.”

DIAGNOSIS: “Love” Masquerading as Hate



Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Sinful Love that Attacks the Other

In many cases, what comes from the branches of our nation is anything but love. The fruit that it bears is rotten, not good (v. 16).

And, what passes for “great love” (v. 13) in our nation today? Amazingly, the love of Donald Trump is still a contender. Love of the American flag has always been near the top of the list, though it seems like this has degenerated into a love of being angry at those who kneel in protest during the national anthem, or who generally object to police brutality. Love of Donald Trump seems to be a defensive love that loves to hate immigrants—to name just one of many targets of such “love.”

There is an awful lot of such corrupted “love” flowing throughout this country. It even tends to inspire an equal and opposite reaction, whereby the rest of us “love” to hate and despise those who love wrongly. This can hardly be what Jesus had in mind. There certainly is no thought of laying down one’s life for anyone other than one’s own “kind.”

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem) Trusting in Hatred of the Other for Validation

For that matter, do the Trump followers or the “We Don’t Protest” club ever show any willingness to lay down their lives for their friends (v. 13)? Are these movements filled with bravery and courage in the face of persecution?

As for the rest of us, how often do we lay down our lives for those who are being murdered by police or targeted by state legislators simply for who they are? We do hear about sprinkled instances of this, but for most of us, it is easier to seethe from a safe distance.

The vines of our nation seem to feed us hate borne of insecurity, envy, and fear of those who are different. Such hate tends to inspire hate in response, especially from a safe distance. We want them to suffer exactly the way they are making others suffer—as if that will bear fruit that is less rotten.

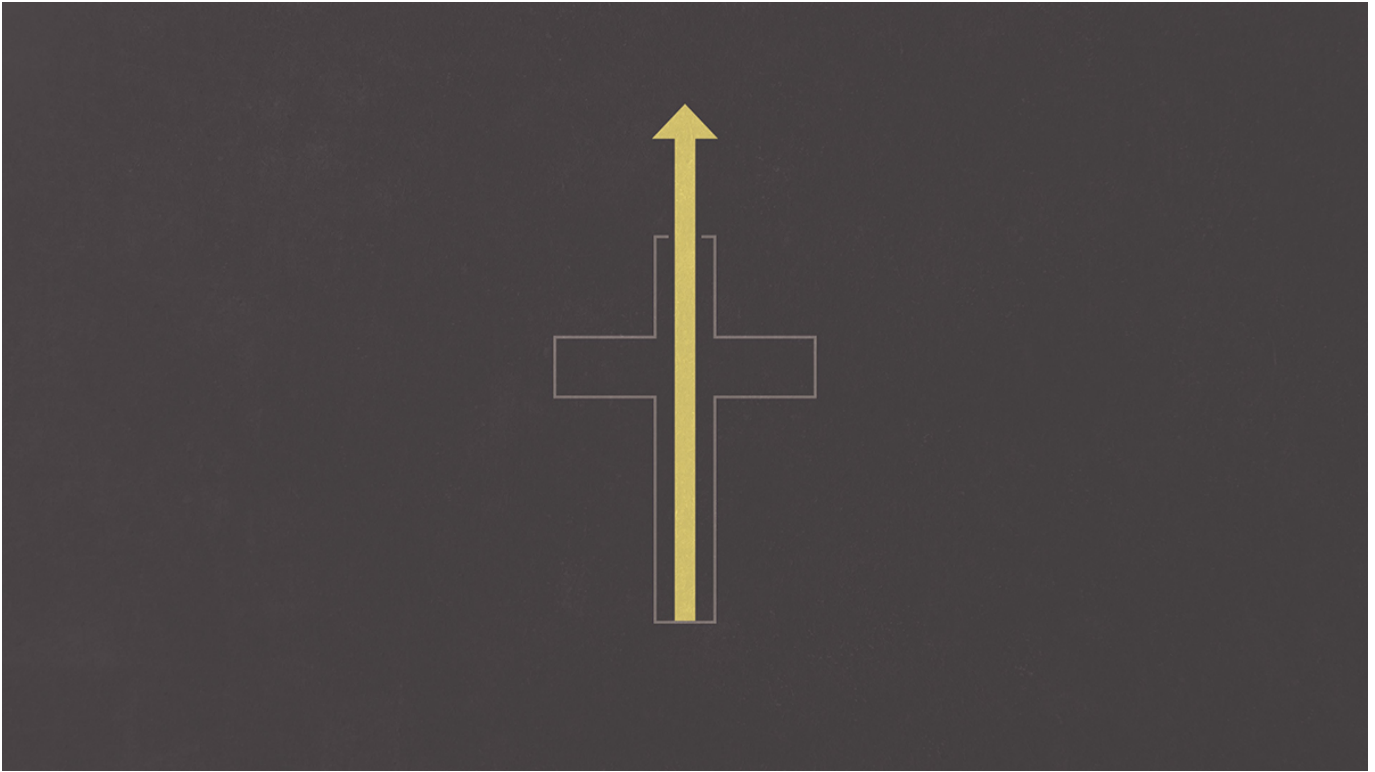
Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Hooked up to In-valid Roots

Is our nation hooked up to the wrong root system? Is it dangerously on its way to being rotten to the core? Will it rightly be said of us, “Your father hates, and so you have hated others (the antithesis of v. 9, see John 8:44)?”

Whose commandments are we keeping (v. 10)? To which “daddy” are

we trying to show fealty? Is God impressed at our misguided attempts to graft ourselves to the wrong vine? And what does Jesus' Father, the only one who counts. think of our attempts at connection? "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (John 1:11).

PROGNOSIS: Self-Sacrificing Love Wins



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The True Vine Hooks Us up to the Good Stuff

And yet, who is it who truly calls us “friend” (v. 14)? The one who lays down his life for us (v. 13). “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you (v. 9).” Jesus searches for us with his heavenly flashlight and grafts us onto his vine to join us to the good stuff. “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (v. 16). “I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father” (v. 15). Jesus binds us intimately to his nourishing core. We are the branches that he has appointed to bear fruit, and because of his nourishing sacrifice, we produce “fruit that will last” (v. 16).

This is who the true vine is: He gathers us discarded branches that were once bound to the tree of hate, and commends us to the vine grower, who lovingly grafts us to Christ himself (v. 1).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Validated by Love

The true vine does not question where the discarded branches came from. He does not check our ethnic status, or how hard we work, or whether we salute the flag in an upright posture. Nor does he abandon us for our past association with the forces of hate. He simply asks, "Do you need eternal love? Do you desire life in my name?" (John 20:31).

Join with me, says Jesus, and you will learn love (v. 17). Just because the world hates you (vv. 18-21), does not mean you have to hate it back. (Jesus eventually promises, toward the end of John 15, to send the Advocate who will testify on his behalf as a response to the world's hate, relieving us of the need to vanquish the world for him.)

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Love that Testifies for the Other in the Face of Hate

The true vine inspires us to love those the world discards or tramples on. Jesus calls us to "love one another" (v. 17), but also appoints us to "go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (v. 16). That love that the vine sends coursing through our branches is not meant to be limited to our own inner circles. It is meant to be spread far and wide, always seeking out new veins of people to include—people bound together not by ethnicity or political affiliation or a cult of personality, but by the love that the true vine inspires in us.

We are joined to Christ to testify to that love, perhaps even lay down our lives to share that love (v. 13). We are called to risk being hated and persecuted because of Jesus the true vine (v. 20). Being called Jesus' friends (v. 14) will be enough to sustain us.