

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.

Thursday night, at the Avon Band concert, a young man sang an old song: Stardust. The tune I know so well, the words I've seldom heard. I listened.

A love song, it is - romantic love. And that got me wondering. For I know it was my mother's favorite song.

I knew my mother so very well, and yet not at all. For I truly knew only one thing about her - her love for me. I don't know what attracted her to my father. Nor what she thought as she heard the haunting melody of Stardust. I cannot picture her full of romantic dreams, starry eyed. For the love I knew from her was different from that all together.

She listened - that is what I remember most of all. She listened. And in her listening I knew I was important.

She sacrificed. She put aside what she might have wanted to do for herself to drive me to activities and prepare food and clean house and clothing.

She disciplined. With my mother there were limits, very clear limits. And when I transgressed the limits, unpleasant consequences followed.

All of this, the listening, the sacrificing, the disciplining I learned to know as love. In our house we didn't talk much about love, but in the listening, the sacrificing, the disciplining I knew that I was loved.

"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you," said Jesus.

The love of Jesus for you begins in the love of God the Father for the Son. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you."

Watch Jesus, again and again he speaks to the Father in prayer. In public requesting the Father's help in healing, for miracles, and in private, praying alone. Jesus speaks to the listening Father.

Hear Jesus: "I have kept my Father's commandments." - even the command to die on the cross, to suffer the loss of everything, even his life - a sacrifice, a discipline. Jesus learned these, was given strength for these, in the love of the Father.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you."

From the Father to the Son, from the Son, to you, one love moving from one to another.

You pray. You speak to your Lord Jesus and you are heard. Sometimes the being heard does not change much in the world out there just as my mother's hearing me may not have changed the situation, but in the hearing, the listening of God you are loved.

Jesus said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend." If a mother's love is full of sacrifice, the carrying of growing life within her own body, the sharing of the air she breathes, the food she eats with the child not yet born, how much more Jesus' sacrifice of his life for us. He died that we might be born children of God. This is the greatest love.

And Jesus disciplines. He says, "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. With Jesus there are limits, guidance, and direction for our life. Part of his love for you is disciplining you, training you in his way. And that way is love.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." From the Father, to the Son, to you, and now to others.

The listening: For most of us, listening is the greatest service we provide to others. We can't fix the lives of those we love - cure their diseases, repair broken marriages, bring back from the dead loved ones. But in our listening we give to our neighbors the very thing that they most want and need.

The sacrificing: We are free to give for nothing - our time, our money, our skills. You who have been given the love of Jesus in his giving his life for you, are free to give to others. You are free to be guided not by the rules and customs of society, but by the love of Jesus in giving.

The disciplining: This is most difficult of all. The disciplining is the first thing we would like to give to our neighbors. We'd like to tell one another how to live for we all are better at seeing what would be good for our neighbor than we are at seeing what would be good for ourselves. But only after the listening, and the sacrificing, only after our neighbor can trust us is a word of disciplining likely to be received.

I began with some thoughts on my mother's love. My mother was no more of a saint than you are - nor any less. I began with her love for it is in our homes that we learn of love, each of us. But whether we learned in our homes a love that was reliable or unpredictable, in Jesus God wants to shape us with the love that never fails, the love of the Father for the Son, the love of Jesus for you.

From the Father, to the Son, to you, to your neighbors, as the song says, "It's about love, love, love." Amen.