Our scripture comes from John 15:9-10. While you’re finding that – a mother bought her son a hamster after he promised he’d take care of it. After a week, she ended up with the responsibility. One evening, exasperated, she asked him, "How many times do you think that hamster would’ve died if I hadn't looked after it?" Her son thought a moment and then replied, "Once?"

**John 15:9-10 As the Father loved Me, I also 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.**

It seems impossible that we’re at the end of another Christmas season. We’ve celebrated Advent. Each week, we lit a candle that symbolized an aspect of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We’ve celebrated not just His first coming, but our expectation of His second coming. He promised He’d come back and we wait expectantly for that day when He will do just that. We don’t wait with dread, but with faith, hope, joy, and peace. We open our eyes each morning knowing that today may be the day that our Lord gathers us to Him and we conduct ourselves in a way that, should the Master of the house choose today to return, we’re ready – He’ll find us waiting with our lamps trimmed, our house set in order. Is your house set in order today?

John 15:9 says, As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.The word love is overused and undervalued in our world today. Love is often used when the word lust should be used. Love is used when the word covet should be used. The Greeks had four words that they used for love – one meant sexual love, one meant friendship love, one meant family or community love… but then one, agape, meant love that was without condition. It’s a selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love. It is the highest of the four types of love spoken of in the Bible. It’s a pure love. This is the love that we find in this verse before us. When Jesus tells us to abide in His love, His love is selfless. His love is sacrificial. His love is unconditional. He holds agape love for us. He doesn’t just love us when we perform, when we look right, when we say the right words or go to church at the right times. He loves us in spite of the times we mess up.

Humans aren’t capable of agape love without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We like to look moonie eyed and talk about the unconditional love we have for our children or our spouse, but let the children not visit for a while or the spouse do something wrong and that agape love becomes very un-agape quickly. As a result, we tend to assign those same characteristics to our Lord. We know what we’ve done and we know how we’d feel if someone we loved messed up that bad, so we assign that variation to God’s love based on our humanness. Subconsciously, we wonder how God could love someone like us – even when we mess up, even when we don’t give like we should, even when we get angry with one another. We try to make God’s love understandable.

Listen to God’s words in Isaiah 55:8-9 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” Like the Peace that we talked about last week, God’s love can never be understood… only received. We think, “God can’t love me because I… until I… only if I…” you fill in the blank. But Ephesians 1 tells us God loved us before the foundation of the world – knowing we’d be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ. You’ve been loved by Him long before you were born and through Jesus, you’ll be loved long after you die. How many times will you die without Jesus? Only once… but it will be to eternal damnation.

Verse 10 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. We know Jesus commanded us to repent, follow Him, let our light shine, make disciples and many other things. But let’s look at John 15:12 - This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Then in verse 17, He says - These things I command you, that you love one another. We will abide in His love when we love one another as He loved us – perfectly, sacrificially, selflessly. The question is then asked, “Who is my brother or my sister?” The answer? We have to believe that everyone either already is or has the potential to be. Therefore, who is excluded from the requirement that we love… no one. John 3:16 says - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. There’s that pesky word – whosoever. That mean coworker may be a whosoever. That family member who drains your soul may be a whosoever. That boss that makes life miserable may be a whosoever. We love them all as potential brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

As we enter this new year, let’s never take our eyes off the Cross. Strive to keep the commandments and teachings of Jesus better every single day. By meditating on Him, we naturally find ourselves abiding in His Love. When I realize the Grace He gave me, I find it sensible to extend Grace to others who are not nearly as bad as me. Only through seeing others as Jesus sees them will we love them with the perfect Grace Jesus gives to us daily. Grace was extended to us – doesn’t it make sense that we must extend that Grace to others?