

As I Have Loved You

John 15:12-17

We are back to our Upper Room series this morning and will be looking at a passage in the middle of John chapter 15. At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the critical importance of having an abiding relationship with him – a relationship where they would dwell on his teaching, obey his commands, and depend on him in prayer. By abiding in him they would bear much fruit to the glory of God and experience fullness of joy. Jesus is the vine; we are the branches – that’s how we are to live the Christian life.

I spoke about how we must be actively engaged in cultivating a relationship with Jesus. Living a passive Christian life is really not an option. Christ is our only source of life and if we are connected to him we will grow and bear fruit, but if we are not connected we are on a road that leads to death.

Now, as we continue in this chapter, Jesus is going to focus on the relationships between his disciples. We don’t know a lot about the relational dynamics between the disciples, but like it would be with any group of Christ-followers, they would have a lot of differences: different personalities, different backgrounds, different perspectives, different strengths, different weaknesses. These differences are a tremendous benefit to the body of Christ, but they also create the potential for tension and division. Earlier that evening we saw how they got into an argument about who would be the greatest in Christ’s kingdom.

So with his departure soon coming, Jesus knew how important the relationships and unity between the disciples would be and he spent time that evening emphasizing and repeating the central command for them to follow in how they treated one another. Our passage for today contains one of those teachings.

It is a good reminder for us, nearly 2,000 years later, about how we are to treat one another in the family of Christ. We have the same kinds of differences they did. We follow the same Lord and Savior, worship the same God, learn from the same Bible, and have the same mission, but we are not a bunch of cookie cutter Christians who fit into the same mold and we never will be. God

doesn't want us to be. He created his church – the body of Christ to be filled with diversity and differences. It's when each of us with all our differences comes together under Christ and does our part that we are a strong and healthy body. It's when all of us with our various differences work together in unity that we show the world there's a power in us that goes beyond human effort.

But as it was with the disciples, our differences create many opportunities for tension, disagreement, argument, division, and so on. So we need to be reminded of Christ's teaching today so we remember what he wants us to aim for in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Chances are you are doing well in some relationships and that's great. But there are probably others that are a real struggle. May the Lord open our hearts to grow into his likeness with those people so that we reflect his glory to the world.

Read John 15:12-17.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

I see two primary themes in this passage: It starts and ends with a command for Jesus' disciples to love one another and in between is a description of Christ's love for and friendship with his disciples. It seems to me that he is using his example of his love and friendship with his disciples as the basis for his command for them to love one another. Thus he says in the opening statement: “Love one another *as I have loved you*.” As we study these things, we need to be asking ourselves, “Am I loving my brothers and sisters in Christ in the way that Christ has loved me?”

How has Christ loved his disciples? Before we look at what he says in these verses, we need to remember what happened earlier that night and how he

already loved them. As I mentioned earlier, that sacred Last Supper actually started with an argument between the disciples about who would be the greatest in Christ's kingdom. They had worldly greatness in mind – a position of power and authority. But Jesus's response was to show what true greatness looked like in his kingdom. He got down, humbled himself as a household servant, and washed their feet. Humility and service – that was true greatness.

After he finished washing their feet, he told them in John 13:12-15: *“Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”*

He doesn't call his act of humility and service “love” right away, but I believe that's what he has in mind because just a little while later he told them in John 13:34-35: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* Love one another, just as I have loved you... it sure seems like he has his act of washing their feet in mind.

He was calling them to a new kind of love – love for one another as brothers in Christ. Before that time there was the command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself.” There was even the command to “love your enemies” in the Sermon on the Mount. Now there is a new command: “Love one another as I have loved you.” This is how everyone would know they were his disciples.

And that's what I think he still has in mind in our passage for today: *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* (Jn. 15:12) This is the third time he's come back to this, which tells you how important it was to him. They had already seen an example of what he had in mind when he washed their feet, and now he explains the kind of love they should have for one another further by using the example of his friendship with them.

Verse 13: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” So this is the ultimate expression of love. This is what Jesus would do for his disciples early the next morning. It’s the same kind of love that he demonstrated when he washed their feet, which I believe was symbolic of the washing that would take place through his death on the cross. Jesus loved them by laying down his life to wash away their sins and save them and he was calling them to have that kind of love for one another.

That’s a high calling! A calling that likely brings conviction to many of us as we think about our thoughts and attitudes toward some of the people in church. Do you demonstrate that kind of love toward your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you willingly lower yourself and serve them and make sacrifices for them? What about those people that rub you the wrong way and get under your skin? What about those who offend you?

Jesus continued to explain what love looks like by describing his friendship with his disciples. In verse 14 he says: “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” I think this is a clarifying statement about who his friends were – those who listened and obeyed him. In verse 15 he tells them he doesn’t call them servants, he calls them friends, and the difference between the two is that he tells them everything the Father tells him. That means he values them as friends and shares all good things from the Father with them. If they were just servants, he wouldn’t do that. They’d be on a “need to know” basis. But they’re not just servants, they’re friends – part of his inner circle of friendship and privy to the secrets of the kingdom.

He goes on in verse 16 to tell them that they were his friends because he chose them to be his friends. It wasn’t they who initiated the friendship, he did. He chose them and he appointed them that they should go and bear fruit and that their fruit would abide – based on the previous passage we know how important that is. He chose them to partake in spiritual life and eternal life. And because of that they would receive many answers to prayer from the Father.

They were his friends, and as his friends, he demonstrated love to them by choosing them, calling them, teaching them, commissioning them, blessing them, and laying down his life for them. It was a special love that he shared

with them and was calling them to share with one another: “*Love one another as I have loved you.*”

How is that going for you and the people in this church this morning? I see many incredible examples of love in this church family every week. When I got my lunch on Tuesday, I saw the women’s Bible study gathered in the Fellowship Hall and I was reminded of the many, many expressions of love I’ve seen in that group over the years. Last week when the trees blew down I saw several people respond right away and throughout this week – humbling themselves and serving. There were people on the roof cleaning gutters and assessing storm damage. I’ve seen people forgive others in the church family who have offended them and extend an olive branch of peace and forgiveness. I see and hear about wonderful help and fellowship between brothers and sisters in Christ – wonderful support and encouragement, even some cases of what we’d call “tough love” where there’s been loving confrontation and accountability.

These are the kinds of things that we need to keep striving for and growing in as a church family.

But, as you probably know, I also hear and see some of the struggles we go through because of differences or offenses caused by others in the church. I have these struggles myself. The temptation is to harbor anger and bitterness and unforgiveness, to talk about people behind their back, to push away certain people and keep them at arm’s length, to argue. If I’m honest with you, I have to admit I engaged in some of these behaviors this week and this passage bring conviction. “*Love one another as I have loved you.*”

One of the great teachings of Scripture about how we are to treat one another comes from Colossians 3:11-14: “*Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. (In other words, Christ has broken down every normal wall of human hostility between us in the church. How then should we treat one another?...)* ¹² *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, (I'm thinking of Jesus in the Upper Room, washing his disciples' feet)* ¹³ *bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against*

another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Convicting to anybody?)¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

Is there anyone that you need to forgive and choose to love this week in response to this message? Whether there is or not, there will be at different times in the future. And it's going to be difficult. But when the Holy Spirit brings conviction and you remember what Christ has called you to do, I encourage you in those times to look to Jesus and how he has shown love to you. Think of the cross where he died to pay for your sins. Think of him seated in heaven as your friend and advocate, interceding on your behalf. And then humble yourself before your brother or sister and love them as Christ has loved you.