

## **Bear Witness**

### **John 15:18-16:4**

We come back to the Upper Room this morning to continue to look at what happened that evening before Jesus was arrested and put to death. We are in John chapter 15 which contains Jesus' teachings to his disciples about three different relationships in their lives. In previous weeks we have seen Jesus' teaching about their relationship with him and with one another, and now we will see his teaching about their relationship with the world.

I want to begin by talking about the idea of tribal loyalties and the deep-rooted values that are held by your family of origin. These are things that everyone in your family is expected to live by as a kind of unwritten code of conduct and honor. It's really unthinkable that anyone would violate the code and if they did, there would be serious consequences and maybe even excommunication. I'll use a lighthearted example to begin with, though these things can become very serious.

I was born in MN, the second of five sons of Gary and Lynnette Danielson – no girls. I grew up in the country, on what once was my great-grandpa's farm. My brothers and I spent most of our time outside, hunting fishing, building tree houses, riding bikes, shooting each other with various non-lethal weapons we created. We were very competitive and loved sports – baseball, basketball, football, and eventually track.

When I was 11, the MN Twins won their first World Series and when I was 15 they won their second. We watched every game and were big fans. We were also big Vikings fans, hoping each year that "this would be our year." Perhaps it was our shared suffering and disappointment and defeat season after season that instilled in us this deep-rooted value of loyalty to the Vikings – no matter how bad it got, we would never cheer for anyone else. It was an unwritten rule in our code of conduct and I didn't even know it was there, until I moved to Wisconsin, and into enemy territory.

It was probably the first Vikings season after I moved when I went back home for a visit and I remember the feeling of being asked by one of my brothers: "You aren't going to become a Packers fan now are you?" It was kind of a

rhetorical question, but it was also a warning and made it clear that if I ever became a Packers fan, there was a good chance I would no longer be welcome back home. It was the unforgivable sin and I shudder to even think about the consequences.

Now we can get a little smile out of that, but there are other matters of tribal loyalties and family values, and codes of conduct that are really quite serious, and if you or anyone in your tribe or family were to violate the code, the consequences can be very harsh, painful, and severe. This is often the case when it comes to the matter of religion.

Some of you have felt the consequences of violating your tribal code when you left a certain church or denomination you grew up in. Something happened inside you and you started to see that the church you were part of was more about religious tradition than following Jesus and eventually you had to leave and find something more and when you did, your family was anything but pleased. They felt like you were leaving them and leaving the faith – falling away and maybe even headed for hell. Since then they've treated you differently and tried to get you to come back, and you maybe even have felt shunned and rejected.

In a somewhat similar way, some of you come from families that aren't religious at all, but very worldly and sinful, and they wear their tough lifestyle as a badge of honor. It binds them together in a common bond, and you were in it too, but then something happened. You had an encounter with Jesus and something changed inside you. You felt that what you and your family were doing was wrong and you eventually got to the point where you had to part ways. And they too felt like you were betraying them "You think you're too good for us now?" It's hard to go back and they don't really want you, so there's conflict and uncomfortable division.

These are two examples that I think will help us understand what Jesus tells his disciples in our passage today about their relationship with the world and what their role and ours is to be.

John 15:18-20

*<sup>18</sup> “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.*

As Jesus begins this teaching, he describes a little bit about what his disciples’ relationship with the world will be like. And it’s not an uplifting description. The sobering reality about their relationship with the world is that the world will hate them and persecute them. It hated and persecuted Jesus, therefore it will do the same to them.

But I think it’s important for us to understand that when Jesus was talking about the “world,” he wasn’t just talking about strangers they didn’t know outside their families and communities. We’ll see later on that he’s very much talking about their own people they had to leave in order to follow him. He’s talking about the people they grew up with in their neighborhoods and communities that were now against them for following Jesus. It was their very own religious leaders, neighbors, even some of their own family members, friends, and acquaintances. The Disciples were first generation followers of Jesus, so “the world” was not just strangers or Romans or Samaritans, it was the people from the community they grew up in who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. It was the people they used to belong to.

Jesus said in verse 19 that he had chosen them out of “the world” and they were no longer part of it. And just as his own people hated him and persecuted him, his disciples would be hated and persecuted as well. Hated and persecuted by their very own people.

Some of you know what that’s like. You’re a first-generation follower of Christ and you’ve had to deal with that kind of hatred and persecution. I think that anti-Christian hatred comes from Satan’s influence in our world – he hates Jesus and his followers and spreads a spirit of anti-Christ throughout the world, even among those who once loved us.

Now, some of us are second or third generation Christians and were actually born into and grew up in Christian families and have had the blessing of being part of a Christian heritage and community. We haven't had to face hatred and persecution from our own people. But I can see that things are changing and there is a growing resistance and hatred toward Jesus in our society, which means that any of us who live as followers of Christ will likely face hatred and persecution someday.

Jesus told his disciples those things were coming, and then he described their persecutors a little more... This is where you can start to see more clearly that he is talking about the people in their very own Jewish community.

Read John 15:21-25.

*But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. <sup>22</sup> If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup> Whoever hates me hates my Father also. <sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. <sup>25</sup> But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'*

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on these verses, but I do want to explain a few things. It is evident that he is talking about the unbelieving Jews that Jesus had ministered to, especially the religious leaders who were going to carry out future persecutions against the disciples. And in these verses Jesus speaks about their sin and guilt of hating God. By hating God without cause, Jesus says in verse 25 that they were fulfilling the prophecies in Psalm 35:19 and 69:4.

They showed they hated God because he, as God's Messiah had come and spoken to them and done works among them that no one else did, thereby revealing that he was the Messiah and the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption for Israel. But they rejected him and hated him and thus were guilty of sin. If Jesus hadn't come and spoken to them and did signs among them, they would not be guilty, but he did, and now they had no excuse. By hating the Messiah and God's plan of redemption, they also revealed that they hated God and would be held accountable.

Jesus wanted his disciples to know that, and then he went on to tell them what their role and ours is in a world that hates us.

Read John 15:26-27.

*“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. <sup>27</sup>And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*

This is the second time he’s mentioned that he would send a Helper to them. The first time he told them in John 14:17 & 26 that the Helper would dwell in them and would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all that he had said to them. This time he says the Helper would bear witness about him and that they also would bear witness. I don’t know if they made the connection, but I think what Jesus was saying was that when it came to their relationship to the world, the Holy Spirit who was in them would bear witness about Jesus through them. Their role in the world that hated them and would persecute them would be to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in them to bear witness to the world.

In their situation, when it came time for them to bear witness, almost everyone would have recently heard of Jesus of Nazareth and his miracles, healings, and teaching, but they also would have heard of his death. So to bear witness meant testifying that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead by the power of the God and appeared to them, and because of that he proved he was the Son of God and Messiah and Savior of all people.

We live on the other side of the world, 2,000 years after Jesus rose from the dead, in a culture where the Christian religion and historical Jesus are somewhat familiar. So bearing witness looks a little different and I think needs to focus on the personal impact that Jesus has made on our lives. In our context if you tell people that Jesus rose from the dead, proving he is the Son of God and Savior of the world, they will say, “Yeah, I know that’s what Christians believe, but I don’t.”

I believe people today need to see and hear about how Jesus has actually changed or influenced your life. Has he set you free from being in bondage to sin and guilt? Has he given you hope and purpose and direction where you had none? Has he given you the power to overcome addictive behaviors? Has he given you a new start from a previously broken life? Has he given you peace in the midst of the problems and uncertainties of life? Then bear witness about these things so people can see that Jesus is real in your life.

That's what we are to do with the people in the world, maybe the family or community that you had to come out of when you became a Christian. Some of them will probably hate and persecute you for becoming a follower of Christ, but with others, the Holy Spirit may open their hearts to hear what you have to say and God can use you to bring them to Jesus.

Jesus finished this part of his teaching in the first few verses in chapter 16...

Read John 16:1-4.

*"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. <sup>3</sup> And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. <sup>4</sup> But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.*

The hatred of the world would be a heavy burden to bear, especially when it came from their very own people. So Jesus wanted his disciples to be aware and prepared, and we need to take these things to heart as well.

The life of a disciple in a world that rejects Jesus is going to be difficult at times because we aren't to be silent. Like Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* We have been called to bear witness about him.

But not only has Jesus given us this calling, he's also given us everything we need to do it. Remember earlier in chapter 15 we saw how Jesus first called

his disciples to abide in him and then commanded them to love one another. It's through our abiding relationship with Christ and our love for one another that we have the strength and support we need to persevere and bear witness. So as we finish this chapter it's important that we remember these three things and keep them together: abide in Christ, love one another, and bear witness to the world.

And as we go out into our week and into the world, may the Lord give us opportunities where we can share with others about how Jesus has changed our lives. Let's spread his hope and life and joy wherever we go, and rejoice as God uses us to call others into his family.