

## **Sermon May 18, 2025**

### **John 13:31-35 The New Commandment**

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

### **All We Need is Love**

Judd grew up in a church not unlike this one. His father was an alcoholic and abusive and his mother had severe depression, but the people in the church offered him the love that he could not find at home. He went to Sunday school and VBS. He sat with his grandparents at the same pew that their grandparents sat at. He looked up at the sun shining through the stained glass and listened to the organ heard the preacher talk about how much Jesus loved HIM... and he believed.

Until... until he was a young teen and started to realize that he was different that the other youth at the church. Until he quietly confided to his youth pastor that he thought he might be gay. Until he saw the look of concern in his pastor's eyes as he took a step back. Until he was told that he was no longer welcome at the upcoming youth lock-in Until he started to wonder if Jesus could really love him.

Until he ran away from home and the sweet people in the pews shook their heads and said: I always knew he'd come to no good. Just look at where he's come from.

Judd ran away and swore he'd never set foot in a church again. No matter what.

They will know we are Christian's by our love...

For those of us gathered here today, church is a place of respite... a place of hospitality... true sanctuary. It's hard to imagine all the Judds who have been hurt in places just like this. Who have felt judged and unwelcomed and even hated. Who would never come to a place like this for help because they have been rejected so many times in the name of Jesus.

It's enough to break your heart. It's enough to break God's heart.

But the Good News is that God never gives up on us. When we build walls instead of bridges, God guides us back to seek a glimpse of a new pathway to God's beloved community where we hear the beloved voice of Jesus calling to us:

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*

Love will open up the pathway and offers us hope.

Jesus' faith took him out of the places like this and out into the mean streets. Jesus went where the people were. He went into the darkest alleys and the places of harm, and he embraced the same people that good religious folk tried really hard to avoid... he offered each and every person a true extravagant welcome. And no one was left behind! Jesus taught and lived that we are called to relate to each other just like God relates to us: to forgive, to become makers of peace, to be instruments of grace... to embrace a new way of living together in the world. We are called, Jesus tells us, to live out God's holy love.

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*

Jesus says that the only way others will know you're a disciple is through our ability to love *everyone* we encounter. And that's not always easy, because we can't pick and choose who we love. Jesus calls us to love indiscriminately – just like he did. To live our lives like Jesus did; to face the same risks that Jesus did: Loving not when we feel like it or on our own terms, but as he did, in all things. "Love one another," he says, "Just as I've loved you."

That doesn't seem so bad, sitting in this place with people we already care about. But what about those we don't already love – and who do really unlovable things. The people who cheat and steal; the ones who abuse their children. The ones who walk into grocery stores and fire into crowds or declare war on neighboring countries. People who use their own faith to justify horrible actions... in the name of Yahweh, Allah or Jesus Christ

It's enough to break your heart. It's enough to break God's heart.

It's then that we look back to Jesus -- who never responds to violence with more violence. We are to love as Jesus loved, not based on our opinions or personal need for justice. Jesus literally died for what he believed and forgave those who killed him, those who betrayed him, those who turned their backs on him and left him to die alone.

So how do we realistically love as Jesus loved? Most of us are not ready to literally pick up the cross and follow him to betrayal, denial and crucifixion. The love of Jesus is too strange, too different from the rest of the world, too divinely whacky for a person just to up and decide to live this way. It's just too hard.

But the mandate is clear; this is God's new commandment to us. It's not optional, we are expected... no required!... to love wholly and completely and fully... no matter what.

Remember Judd? Remember what happened to him when the church forgot to put love in action? When he ran away from home, he ended up living on the streets of Philadelphia. One day, a girl he was with overdosed. She fell to the ground and he knew she was dying. He didn't have a phone and called out for help. No one came. He screamed for someone to call 911, but no one stopped. He looked up and all he saw were the feet of busy men and women, hurrying to work, ignoring the two street kids in the alley. He tried to do CPR, but he didn't really know what he was doing. Then he tried to do one more thing. "I remembered all those Sunday School lessons:" he said "The promises that Jesus would be with me. So, I tried to pray. It's the only thing I could think of to try and help her." Jesus came to him that cold morning in the alleyway.

He will dwell with them;  
they will be God's peoples,  
and God will be with them;  
and wipe every tear from their eyes.

The girl's life was saved, and so was his. From that day on, he began to reclaim his faith. He found a church community that accepted him and helped him get back on his feet. Now, years later, he graduated from college and is working with street kids who are just like him. And he credits it all to Jesus, who came to him when he needed him most.

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another, Jesus says. To love each other just as I have loved you.*

A long time ago, as he hung on the cross, Jesus prayed for the very people who were killing him. "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing."

"Love one another," he said. "Love one another..." No matter what.