

Love One Another
John 13:1-5, 34-35
Sunday, October 18, 2026

This may come as news to some of you, but we're about to have an election. I know that if you watch any television, this will NOT be news. This time of year, it's painful to watch TV ... or really any sort of media. The ads are everywhere. And most of them are not very nice. In fact, it seems like more and more, the ads have very little to do with who's the best candidate. They're mostly about who's good and who's evil.

And, of course, these ads reflect our culture. We as a culture are going down the same road (or maybe it's the ads that are following the culture). In any case, it's getting harder and harder to simply disagree with one another. The reflex on pretty much any substantial issue is to separate into our respective tribes, whether its political parties or nations, and to view everyone who agrees with me (or looks like me or talks like me or believes like me) as "us," and everyone else as "them." And you know how it goes from there. "Us" is good and "them" is evil.

And, of course, this isn't a recent phenomenon. In fact, that's pretty much how things worked in Jesus' day. His people, the Jews, were what's known as a tribal culture. The tribe, more or less, took care of its own, but everyone else was considered, if not evil, at least "other."

By Jesus' time, the Jewish "tribe" was considered more or less a nation, but the idea was the same. So, for instance, the Jews and the Samaritans were two different nations: and although they had a whole lot of common ancestors and history, they hated one another with a passion.

So, the setting for today's scripture is an upper room in Jerusalem. Jesus is with his disciples—his own little tribe—to celebrate the last supper. Towards the end of the supper, Jesus gives them a “new command.” We just heard it: love one another. If you read all the way through John's Gospel, you'll see this is the *only* actual command he gives them. Love one another. That probably suggests it's pretty important, don't you think?

Now, in one sense, this might not have seemed like such a big deal to his little tribe. They might well have considered it nothing more than an expression of the tribal ethos they had grown up with and lived with their entire lives: love those within the tribe, and hate everyone else. We've got to stick together. It's us against the world.

But when you look at it from the perspective of everything they've experienced of Jesus for the three years leading up to that last supper, as well as what would happen the next day, the story becomes much different.

And Jesus starts out today's scripture by demonstrating that difference. He serves them; his followers, his disciples. He performs the most menial and disgusting of all possible tasks. He washes their feet.

And, in doing that, he was undoubtedly intending to call to their minds all he had done for them over the last three years. And not just for them, but for just about everyone he came in contact with during his ministry. He wanted to remind them that love isn't just a cozy feeling we have towards those who are close to us. It's an action. And it's an action directed not just at those in our own tribe, but towards everyone.

So, maybe those disciples remembered, as Jesus washed their feet, how he loved the people of Galilee enough to go to them, travelling the hot, dusty roads of Galilee to teach them, heal them, cast out their demons; to bring them healing and wholeness, dignity and love.

Maybe the disciples also remembered how Jesus hung out with pretty much anyone and everyone, all the way from the despised tax collectors to the honored Pharisees; how he didn't run away from the sick and those considered "unclean" by the culture—even lepers—but instead touched them and healed them. How he even healed a Roman Centurion's servant and the son of a Gentile woman.

And then, in the days to come as they looked back on that last Passover with Jesus, those disciples might have remembered that he ate it with *them*. This in spite of the fact that he knew one of them was going to betray him to a horrible, painful death. And in spite of the fact that that very night, all the rest of them would abandon him. In fact, his handpicked successor Peter would actually deny him three times.

In sum, Jesus was prompting those disciples to remember; to remember how he loved. Not just his family, not just his friends. Not just the people who looked like him or talked like him or believed and worshipped like him. Not just the ones polite society said were acceptable. He loved them all.

Which might have jogged their memory regarding some of the things he had taught them in his time with them. Maybe they remembered that story about the Jewish man who had been waylaid and rescued by the hated Samaritan. Or maybe that time he told them, don't just

love your friends—the people who will love you back—where’s the fun in that? Instead, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Love everyone.

As we’ve been talking about the last three weeks, Jesus didn’t just hang out with his disciples for three years for grins. He did it to prepare them to follow in his footsteps. To live and teach and heal, to bring peace, joy, and love as he did. In short, to *be* his disciples; to continue his ministry when he was no longer physically with them. And that ministry was love: loving God and loving people, and by doing that, spreading the Good News of New Life in Jesus Christ.

Which he makes clear at the end of today’s scripture when he says: “*And this is how they’ll know you are my disciples, that you love one another.*” The world will see their love and want some of that for themselves.

And, in fact, that’s what happened. The main thing that set those early Christians apart from pretty much everyone else in the Roman Empire was that they provided food, clothing, shelter, health, healing, wholeness not just to the folks in their own tribe, but to anyone and everyone.

In fact, in the mid 4th Century, the Emperor Julian was seeking to bring back paganism to an increasingly Christianizing Roman Empire. And, in doing so, he argued that if the pagans wanted to attract converts, they should behave more like the Christians. So, he wrote: “*For it is disgraceful that ... the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well*” The Christians were different, they were weird, they were strange. They loved. And that’s why they grew.

We, as Jesus' modern day disciples, are called to be just as weird, just as strange. Especially right now, at this time in our political calendar. We're called to swim against the cultural current.

In a culture that becoming increasingly tribal and increasingly angry and violent, living love is at least as different as it was in Jesus' day. It's at least as strange. And, just as it did then, it resonates. People still want to get them some of that.

And the reason is simple. That's how we were created to be. Remember, God is love and that's the image we were created in. Our real, authentic life is found living in love with God and one another. And when people see that in action, it's like that first cold front coming out of nowhere at the end of a brutally hot Texas Summer.

We're created to live in God's love and through living that love, spread it. We're created to become like Jesus ourselves and, in the process, change the people around us.