



DISCIPLE

With Jesus | In Community | On Mission

SERMON TITLE: The Mark of a Disciple: Love

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SCRIPTURE: John 13:34-35

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The earliest followers of Jesus didn't call themselves Christians. They didn't think of themselves as members of a religion. They considered themselves disciples – students and apprentices of Rabbi Jesus. So if this is who we're supposed to be, how do we begin to define 'disciple'? Is being a disciple about knowing certain things? Doing certain things? Saying, believing, or rejecting certain things? If so, what? Is there a manual for this? How long does it take? And what's the point of it all? Or simply, what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

Jesus is spending his last night with his disciples. He's walked with them for years, but now his time has dwindled down to mere hours. And Jesus knows this. He's fully aware that his time has come (John 13:1). So everything Jesus is teaching and saying on this final night carries a different kind of weight to it. These are sort of "death bed" sentiments.

In John 13:34-35 we encounter a core idea within Jesus' Kingdom and simultaneously a head-scratcher. Jesus sets the stage for this teaching by first displaying unthinkable humility as he washed the disciples' feet (a job reserved only for the servant of the house) and then transitions into a series of teaching. In these two verses under study, Jesus offers what I think is one of his most important and radical teachings.

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. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another."

There's a conflict. What's new about this? I mean think about it from the disciples' perspective. They have been following him for the past three years, seeing him teach with authority, perform miracles, speak to the weather, cast out demons, gather the masses, disrupt systems, etc. And now, here on his final night, he reveals that he's had a card to his chest the entire time which he hasn't yet revealed and he's about to let them know what it is. A new commandment. You can envision their anticipation. So then Jesus says it: love one another.

But that's not new! I wonder if the disciples in that moment were confused. Jesus has already taught on the subject of love. Many times, in fact. The Old Testament, in which these disciples would have been steeped, taught on love too. This isn't new. So what does Jesus present it as such? Look closer. "Love one another *just as I have loved you*." For the first time, love is a command given with a precedent for how it's supposed to look. Jesus is saying the ways we love each other should not waver from the model of his love for us. And this wasn't a vague, spiritualized, conceptual love. No, he put skin on, left his Heavenly throne, became man, and lived it. There's no room for interpretation. The reflection of our love should mirror the love of Jesus.

The word for love here is the Greek word *agape*. In English, the word love is defined based on context. You can use the same word in various ways. But in Greek there are specific words for love, each having its own meaning. *Agape* in the New Testament is typically used to describe a divine love, selfless love, or unconditional love. How are we capable of manifesting such a love for each other? I believe a divine love is only possible through a divine presence which is why I think Jesus almost immediately starts talking about the Spirit which he will later give us (John 14).

So we've got the model (the life of Jesus) and we've got the means (the Spirit of Jesus). But is it really that simple? I would like to suggest that if you zoom out of our two verses and look at the ministry of Jesus as a whole we can extract four pillars of what this *agape* love would look like so that we have action steps of how to apply it.

1. Trust. This is the foundational bedrock of every single relationship. Trust is built over time and while love is free, trust is earned. The deposits go in very slowly but come out quickly if trust is hurt. It's easily lost and hard to restore, though not impossible. The authentic self needs to be present, so no masks. It requires shared experiences and vulnerability to achieve.
2. Communication. As you might have guessed, trust is required for deep levels of communication. This is the means by which you navigate the relationship. It cannot live in the shallow waters forever and requires embracing conflict, working towards resolution, forgiveness, confession, depth, honesty, confrontation, etc. If fear prevents deep levels from being achieved, trust is hurt. Healthy communication requires intentionality and adaptability.
3. Commitment. This is the strength of a relationship. It's the mindset that even if hard times come, we will stick this out. It is a choice, not a feeling, which enables continual investment and resilience to adversity. This is modeled by Jesus to us. We typically give up on relationships that could have otherwise endured if communication and trust had been stronger. It requires endurance and hope.
4. Integrity. This is the stability of the relationship. Integrity is the personal quality of character which you're bringing in. It assumes the best and does not slander or gossip. It is an internal posture of love towards others and resists any inconsistencies in what we say and do. It is self-sacrificing for the sake of the relationship and requires consistency and character. If integrity is lacking, trust is severed, communication breaks down, and commitment runs short.

Each one of these work with each other, feed each other and lead to one another in the cycle of agape. If even one is absent, the relationship will begin to suffer and will not resemble what Jesus modeled to us.

In many ways, these two verses summarize our discipleship triangle which we've been studying for weeks now. I think it would sound something like this:

Having been filled with the Spirit through your faith in Jesus (Life with Jesus), create the realities of Kingdom love on this earth with each other (Life in Community), so that all people will know you are my disciples (Life on Mission).

Discussion Starters

- What stood out to you the most from the message today?
- Think about the life of Jesus. Can you identify times where he modeled one of the four pillars of agape?
- Has there ever been anyone in your own life to model this kind of love?
- Would you say that your small group, or friend group, or even family is marked by this kind of love? How so or why not?
- Why do you think this kind of love is so difficult to create with one another? Why do you think agape love is not normal for relationships?
- Which of the four pillars of agape do you need Jesus to help you with the most?
- What would need to happen right now for your community to begin living in these four pillars? (Does trust need to be restored or built? Does a conversation need to happen or conflict need to be addressed? Do commitment levels need to be addressed and defined? Is there sin that needs to be confessed or reconciliation that needs to take place?)