

Sermon prepare for Grace Church on John 15:9-17 April 3, 2016 by Jonathan Shradar

Resurrection Sunday was a sweet one for me. To be gathered with church family and celebrate the gift of resurrection - the new life that is to be had in it, the new purpose, the living Savior to run after... and to know that every Sunday is resurrection Sunday in a Christ-exalting church!

But there also comes with Easter the cultural baggage... the strategies to put our best foot forward or have the shiniest postcard in the mail... to have the best sermon, the warmest welcome and the biggest prize for a guest to win... We are a small church so we don't do a lot of those things, not that they are all bad, but as some of us reflected on Easter this last week it left me wondering what the watching world around us thought about it.

Easy to be liked when the holiday involves candy... Some call Christians extremists...

What proofs do we have for the claims we make? How will the truth that we embrace hold up out there? What is our strategy for doing church together?

In John 15 we have, directly from Jesus a command that is the primary work of followers of Christ. It is what we are meant to be known for. And it may seem radical to the outside world and maybe even to some of us...

Jesus calls those that love him to extreme love for each other.

Jesus is giving his farewell address to his disciples. He has washed their feet. They have shared the passover meal together. He announces that one of them will betray him and that he will soon leave them. He has promised the gift of the Holy Spirit as another helper to be with them forever. Then he takes the disciples that remain on a walk to the garden where he will plead with the Father... for the unity among believers and for the glory he has come to secure.

As they walk he tells them of how he is the vine and they are branches. That they are to abide, or remain in him and bear fruit, add to their branches. They are to stay in his love, letting it drive them and shape them. And in love they are to follow his command... "On the assumption that they are moved by love for God and Jesus, Jesus' followers are exhorted to act out this love in their relationships with one another."

This is not only for the 11 on the walk with Jesus, it is for us, for the church, to live in this love.

This morning as we hear Jesus' words we want to evaluate the **Command to Love**, see how grand is the **Scope of Love** and look for the **Fruit of Love**.

1) Command to Love

John 15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

For God's people commands to love were not new. There was the command to Love God with all of who they were. And then a levitical call to love neighbor as self. Simply because "I am the Lord."

But in this command from Jesus he has raised the standard of love and the reason for it. So there are two important aspects of this command to love that are new, unique and can only follow after Jesus. We go back a couple of chapters to see the institution of this command.

Imagine the scene, Jesus has washed his disciples feet, he has stated that he must make them clean, wiping away the filth of the street and refreshing his followers.

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. Of course this is the command. We all know it. We all rally around it. We talk of it often... "Of all the commands of our Master there is none which is so much talked about and so little obeyed as this." Ryle

But do we get the weight of what Jesus is directing his disciples to do? This isn't a call to be nice generally, so that others will be generally nice to us. This isn't a call to keep to ourselves and think nice thoughts about other people. This is to live with a love that looks like the love of God for us, toward other believers. This is a raised standard of love. This new command is to love one another just as Jesus has loved them.

And it has a purpose... "by this all people will know that you are my disciples..." To love as Jesus loved us so that others will see it. That we would be known as followers of Christ.

If you love me, Jesus is saying, of course you are going to keep my commandments, you will love one another just as I have loved you, that others would see and be stunned by your love for one another. That they would recognize something special, something unique, something Christ-like in the way you care for and love one another in the church.

Jesus really means this too... he will state in in chapter 13, in our text and again allude to it in his prayer to the Father in chapter 17. He is repeating the command because it is important that the disciples, and that we get it. This is the mission of his followers, to love...

So we could all agree. This is what the church is supposed to be about, what we are supposed to look like, lovers. We could take this agreement and stop here - the shortest sermon I have ever preached - but I think we would miss the difference Jesus is calling for in this love - this real tangible - Jesus-like love.

“We are to love all Christians “as I,” Jesus says, “have loved you.” Now think of both the quality and the quantity of Jesus’ love toward us.” Schaeffer

2) Scope of Love

“As I have loved you...” There are so few words that have such depth and such magnitude. This is no longer love as you want to be loved... but how you have been loved by your Savior.

Jesus widens the scope of love to match his extreme love for us... there are many places we could go in Scripture to categorize how he loved, but there are four characteristics near our text that make up the core of how he loved and we can use them to think of how we might love one another.

a) Humble

At the communicating of this new commandment, Jesus has been on his knees, humbling washing the feet of his disciples. He is the teacher, He is the center of this group of people and yet he takes off his outer garments and bathes the feet of those that follow him.

This is Jesus the servant. No task too low, no station beneath him. This is humble love. And he tells them “you also should do just as I have done to you... you should serve each other.”

How does this mesh with our outlook on life in our day? Having worked in Washington, DC for a number of years, I am not sure this flies real well! Everything is about position and order. Who has the bigger motorcade, the army of minions to do their bidding. And ask someone who has been a Congressman to make copies or move furniture! This is not far off from our lives, it is human nature. “Don’t you know who I am...”

Jesus completely flips this reality for the Christian. No task too low... What would this look like among us? Meeting needs in profound ways of serving - surprising one another with meals... helping on projects around the house... setting aside our rights to care for our brother or sister... No rank among us that prevents serving.

In Christ, we're all foot-washing servants. Nobody's bigger than anybody else. Our gifts & callings are all of grace. The last will be first.

So our love for one another, just like Jesus’ love for us, is to be humble, a serving love.

b) Seeking

Jesus is giving his command to those that he sought after, that he invited to follow him. His love is a seeking love.

15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...”

Their standing and relationship with him is a matter of grace. In love he came for them, he found them and called them to himself. This is our relationship with Jesus as well - chosen in him. This is an adopting love.

This changes how we approach each other. Loving like him we seek each other out. There is no wait and see who comes to me type love, this is pursuit, loving each other with a welcome, a desire to be around them and to be in their lives. This is a hard one for us because our lives are so full already.

Jesus' love though is a seeking love. This drives us to ask of needs, to know each other, to make the effort to be in community with one another. This might be calling people during the week to check on them, shifting our home groups to intentionally know the needs of each member and lovingly helping. Establishing Cord groups - 2 or 3 to deeply know each other and help.

This will also have us outward facing, to invite others into the love of the church - those we see in need and share the gospel with. We go, we love not because we are worthy, or equipped, or attractive, or skilled, or experienced, or in any way suitable and appropriate. We love because we have been [sought].”

This love we have for one another is humble, it is a seeking love and it is an elevating love.

c) Elevating

Where before, Jesus lowers himself to serve, now in his love he brings up his “friends.”

15:14-15 “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.”

This is his grace - unmerited favor - at work. He is elevating the disciples from servitude to friendship. And this is no small thing... even the regular Rabbis of the day would not categorize or call their followers, disciples as “friends.” This is the God of the universe, the anointed One, loving by way of promotion.

This is what he does with us. He is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters, to call us friends. To share his inheritance with us and give us the right to be children of God.

This is inviting the boys from the mailroom into the board room and giving them a permanent seat at the table. The ultimate rags to riches story, and it all happens because of the love of another. This is Jesus' love for us.

It translates into our love for each other as outdoing one another in honor. We are quick to give up the better seat, to be transparent, to claim each other as our own. To take up each other's case and to protect one another.

How absurd would it be if I went up to a random person on the street today and I told them I expected them to love me with a humbling love, to serve me. To seek after me, to pursue me and discover my needs. To elevate me, to advocate for me and to honor me at every opportunity... they would think I was crazy! This is extreme... but this is the love Jesus is commanding. Do you see that. Love as he loved... This is what we are meant for in the church... and it is not over yet.

d) Sacrificial

15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

This love goes to the point of death. To the audience that John's Gospel is written to, saying you would die for your friends would be fairly common. That is what you did for friends, at least that is what you said you would do. Because someone was your friend, they have been elevated to that status, you would sacrifice much for them.

But Jesus doesn't just give lip service to sacrificial love, he follows through. In just hours from this conversation with the disciples he will be suffering on a cross for them, and us. His love takes on the ultimate of sacrifices for those that believe in him. Greater love has no one than this. That an innocent man would take the place of messed up and sinful people.

And this is love like he has loved, to sacrifice and lay down ourselves for one another. In our day and context we may not be put in a place to actually die for one another but we will be given opportunities to sacrifice our time, treasure and emotion for one another.

Signing up to serve where there are gaps... being generous toward the church and each other... shifting priorities to make one another interaction happen regularly... Sometimes giving up places of comfort for the purpose God has given you. Sweat, labor and sacrifice for one another.

That we would be known for this kind of love.

This is valuing the church, determining life around serving and being among these people. Loving with humility, seeking out others, elevating one another into your life as honored members and sacrificing for them, all because you have been loved. All of this is really familial relationships on steroids and without self-benefit or manipulation for gain...

Jesus has given his followers a tall order. This new commandment is no joke. But it not without purpose, it is headed somewhere and the fruit of it is glorious.

3) Fruit of Love

By this all people will know you are my disciples... if you love one another.

15:16-17 “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.”

In the context of the imagery of the vine and the branches bearing fruit, Jesus is talking about evangelistic fruit... that others would hear his message of grace and witness the love the church has for one another, becoming believers in him. So while we can look at this deep love for one another and think of the benefits we receive in it... it's purpose is to present Jesus to those outside the church.

This love becomes our evangelism tract!

“the practice of genuine love and oneness is the final apologetic to a watching world of the reality of God and the truth that is found Jesus and the Gospel.” Francis Shaeffer

Our love for one another is used by the Spirit to bear fruit, human fruit that remains, that lasts and becomes part of the family.

But not only does it bear fruit... it bring us joy.

15:11 “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

In Christ, this love is what we were made for. This is what he has placed us into a family of believers for, to love, to have humble, seeking, elevating and sacrificial love for one another, that the world would know and believe and that our joy would be full in Christ.

The church is for lovers. **Jesus calls those that love him to extreme love for each other.**

Gospel Actions:

Savor Examples of this Love: Look to Jesus, be remind over and over again of the depth of his love for you. Then rejoice when you see it in others around you. Those serving and sacrificially giving as part of the church family.

Lean into Love: Believe in the love of Jesus for you. Find “one anothers” to love on and dive in. Get in on this. Pray for and look for opportunities to love each other

Sunday serving... It takes 28 people to cover all the areas of ministry; maybe loving is signing up for the ‘role least like you’ to meet the need. Maybe it means giving sacrificially to continue equipping the church for ministry.

Honor one another, seek each other out, change your calendars to share love, speak well of one another...

It would be so easy to just stop there... to give you the duty and not put the emphasis on the motivation for it all.

“I can try to love you, but to love you as much as Jesus has loved me is beyond my natural ability. He loved us when we were unlovely, and we are call to model that kind of love. No wonder Jesus talked so much about sending the Holy Spirit to help us.” R.C. Sproul

Trust Jesus: We can't do this in our own strength...

15:9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.”

Just as the Father loves Jesus, so Jesus loves us. Jesus loves us just as much as the Father loves him. We cannot earn Jesus' love. Our obedience to Jesus merits nothing, but it profits greatly.

The radical grace of the gospel transforms servanthood into friendship. Only grace can free us to obey Jesus out of friendship and worship, and no longer out of fear or self-interest. So we live trusting him, to soften our hearts to make us lovers, to adhere us to a family of believers to love on and to use us for his glory that others may believe.

Jesus calls those that love him to extreme love for each other.

This what the world is meant to see. This is who we are meant to be. By the Spirit, may it be so.