

The Difference Between Us and Them

John 14:15-21

In our Bible passage today, Jesus knows that he is heading toward his death.

In chapter 13, the passage leading up to this one, Jesus had knelt down like a lowly servant and washed his disciples' feet. We can assume that they were shocked, humbled, and confused by his actions.

But we only know for sure how Simon Peter and Judas felt. Simon objected and tried to stop Jesus. And Judas Iscariot simply left the group. He never returned to the disciples' fold.

We can profess our love all day long—but how do we prove it? Judas had lived with Jesus and eaten with him and ministered with him for three years. He had all the marks of someone who loved Jesus. But, in the end, he betrayed at night, in a garden, with a kiss.

Our text this morning relays Jesus' last major rallying cry before his arrest and crucifixion. He needed to know which of his disciples would tough it out and follow his example, and which ones would give up and walk away. Which ones would fall on their sword, so to speak, and which ones would fall to pieces.

It's a good question to ponder in the church today. Because it's so easy to be a Christian in our culture. We don't face significant persecution or risk by declaring our faith. There are churches in every community across this land.

There are Christian television and radio stations, Christian movie streaming services and book clubs. Celebrities and Sports stars give interviews on their faith in Jesus. Just about every major presidential candidate claims to be a Christian, or at least to respect Christian values. Christians in our culture look and act just like everybody else. So how do you tell the difference?

Jesus said the difference is found in this: "If you love me, keep my commands." 'Nuff said. Drop the mike. So, if we love Jesus, we keep his commands. And if we don't keep his commands, no amount of Christian t-shirts and Christian podcasts and soul-searching small group discussions will help. If we love him, we will keep his commands.

So I guess it'd be good to know what Jesus' commands that we're supposed to follow are, right? We could look at the very first command Jesus made in the book of John 1:43 when he told Philip, "Follow me." Or we could look at his last command in John 21:22, when he told Peter, "You must follow me."

But in between these chapters, Jesus gave a crystal-clear command that was at the very heart of his ministry 2,000 years ago and still resonates with His will to this very day. And it's not even in our text for this morning. It's in John 13:34-35: "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

It's interesting what Jesus left out here. He didn't command the disciples to be eloquent preachers or skilled leaders or courageous witnesses to an unbelieving society. He commanded them to love one another just as he had loved them.

Now a commandment, coming from God in the flesh, is non-negotiable. It's not what Jesus wished for us or recommended for us. It's what he commanded us to do.

Actually, every one of God's commands is a challenge to us, but it's also a gift to us. God's commands protect us from harm and provide order and justice in human

relationships. So we can hear the word “command” as a burden or a challenge, or we can hear it as a gift. And Jesus intended this commandment to be a gift.

Loving like Jesus loves is the central requirement for discipleship because it gives our life purpose, requires sacrifice, and changes lives. Let’s look at that a bit closer.

Loving like Jesus gives our life purpose. In this sense, Jesus’ command is a gift. How many of you know people who are never satisfied, who are always chasing after some accomplishment or milestone that will give them a sense of purpose? It’s exhausting and frustrating to build a life around titles or accomplishments or image.

When Jesus commanded us to love one another as he loved us, he was removing our own agenda and priorities and replacing them with his. The moment you accept Jesus as your Lord, your life purpose becomes loving others like Jesus did. No title or accomplishment can provide the joy and satisfaction of putting love into action on behalf of others.

Loving like Jesus also requires sacrifice. Sacrificing some part of yourself for something or someone you love enlarges your love and grows you into the person God created you to be. In fact, I’d argue that sacrifice is the greatest proof of love.

Jesus told his disciples in our passage for today that if we love him, then he will show himself to us. What an astounding promise! Jesus will show himself to those who love him. And Jesus gave us the ultimate example of sacrificing himself for those he loved. So when we sacrifice ourselves in an act of love, we’re letting the spirit of Jesus come alive in us.

Let me tell you about Maria Dyer born in 1837 on the mission field in China. Her parents died when she was young and she was sent to live with relatives in England. At age sixteen, she and her sister returned to China to serve as missionaries themselves.

A few years later, Maria married a missionary named Hudson Taylor and the two of them worked to disciple the Chinese people and to care for many destitute children. Their ministry together was powerful, but tragically short. Maria died of cholera at the age of forty-three. Her tombstone bares these words: “For her to live was Christ, and to die was gain.”ⁱ

Maria Dyer Taylor understood the sacrifices God was calling her to make. Her parents had died on the mission field. Four of her children died on the mission field. Other Christian organizations often criticized the Taylor’s ministry. But none of these heartbreaks or frustrations affected her commitment.

She always knew that she would give up her life to spread the message of Jesus to the Chinese people. Loving like Jesus requires sacrifice.

Lastly, **loving like Jesus changes lives.** Love is the most powerful force in the universe because it has the power of life in it. Love has the power to create new things, to open minds, to heal hearts, to unite enemies, to make a difference. You cannot carry the power of love in your heart and mind and not be changed.

This is how Jesus fulfilled his promise that he will show himself to those who love him. When we love like Jesus, he changes our identity and our priorities into *his* identity and *his* priorities. And that change doesn’t just affect our lives. It affects the lives of those around us too.

Jesus prepare his disciples to carry on his mission after he was gone by giving us a singular purpose that requires sacrifice and that will change our lives. “So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should

love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

ⁱ *The Jubilee Story of the China Inland Mission* by Marshall Broomhall.