

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Equipped BY Jesus to Live FOR Jesus

(Studies in the Upper Room Discourse; John 13-17)

Discipleship's Litmus Test

(John 13:18-38)

Study #2

Introduction: The last things we talk about...

Jesus knew that on this Passover night, He was spending the last chunk of time He would have with His disciples before His death. So, He chose the themes He addressed with great care. That is what we would expect from someone with little time left.

If you've spent much time with people who know that their time is short - they're moving away soon; they are dying soon - you know that it's usually like that.

There is no time for trivialities. No energy for talking about the weather. No heart to argue about the latest box scores. People with little time on their hands talk about the stuff that counts.

So, on this, His last night, as we saw last week, the first topics Jesus addressed were (1) maintaining close relationship with Him by confession of sin and (2) servanthood.

It is no surprise that His next topic is love.

Before He talked about the primacy of love, though, Jesus needed to take care of an internal, apostolic problem.

John 13 began with Jesus washing the dirty feet of His disciples. By doing that, He modeled for His followers the importance of service.

He showed them that He was willing to sacrifice His own comfort and reputation to serve them. We're about to see that one of His followers was very willing to sacrifice Jesus.

The transition from the foot-washing scene is painful. When He was again reclining at the table / couch, He spoke and gave a stunning revelation to the whole group.

The Ugly Stench of Betrayal (vv. 18-30)

Jesus' Stunning Announcement of a Betrayer (vv. 18-20)

[18] "I am not speaking about all of you. I know the ones whom I have chosen;¹ but this is happening so that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'"² [19] "From now on I am telling you before it happens, so that when it does happen, you may believe that I am He.³

This phrase, ***[18] "... 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'"*** is a quote from Psalm 41.

That psalm paints a picture of a trusted companion, a close friend who, for no apparent reason, kicks his friend in the face. And the face-kicker, in Jesus' case, was Judas Iscariot.

Judas had walked the roads of Judea and Galilee with Jesus, had seen His miracles, had heard His teachings, had received His gifts. And Jesus knew that it was Judas who would betray Him.

¹ Jesus' choosing of His disciples was the opposite of Jewish tradition. Normally, a disciple would choose a rabbi to follow. Jesus chose these twelve.

² This is a *partial* quote from Psalm 41:9. Part of the verse from Psalm 41 is not included, specifically, the words, ***[9] "Even my close friend, in whom I trusted who ate my bread..."*** See John 2:24, where John tells us that Jesus was not entrusting Himself to any man. This Psalm, written by King David, probably refers to the traitorous actions of Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor, who turned against him in the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 17)

³ This general prediction of a betrayal (the specifics of which he would only reveal to John) would help the disciples see, in retrospect, that even at this low point, Jesus was still in control.

At this last meal with the Twelve, the prospects of the cross loomed large in Jesus' mind and were heavy on His heart.

Added to that weight was the knowledge that one of His close companions had already decided to turn Him over to His fiercest opponents - and that must have hurt.

Yes, I know He was the Son of God. But let's not forget that Jesus was also fully human, too.

That means that every emotion we experience was available to Him. And on His last night, He tasted the anguish of being betrayed by someone into whom He had poured His life.

So, Jesus made the announcement - and He didn't let the topic of betrayal drop. He told His followers that the betrayer was one of them, one of those sitting at the Passover table.

Jesus' [mostly hidden] Revelation of the Betrayer (v. 21-26a)

[21] When Jesus had said these things, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me."

Immediately, eleven men are thrown into confusion.

Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, Bartholomew, Philip, Matthew, the other James, and Simon the Zealot had no idea what Jesus was talking about.

They could not believe that there was a traitor in their midst.

It would be like you, a member of a basketball team, heard your coach tell you and your teammates in a huddle with just seconds remaining in a close game, that a team member was planning to throw the game.

Or imagine your commanding officer telling your squad right before you leave for a dangerous mission that he knows that one of you is working for the other side.

You don't want to believe that one of your own was even capable of that.

Having an enemy is a part of life. Indira Ghandi knew that. She was the Prime Minister of India during the 1960's and into the early 80's. She had enemies and she lived with that reality.

To protect her against these enemies, Ms. Ghandi had a well-trained detail of trusted, personal bodyguards, much like our Secret Service guards the President.

Ms. Ghandi was assassinated on October 31, 1984, by two of those men entrusted with her protection.

Having an enemy within the ranks of people you know, love, and trust is hard to bear.

[22] The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking.⁴

Evidently, not one of them suspected Judas.

That's clear from the conversations we follow here in the Gospel of John, as well as what we read in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

From the Gospel accounts, we know a good bit about the seating arrangement at this Last Supper.

And we can be sure that it was not at all like the famous Leonardo da Vinci painting showing all thirteen men seated on one side of a modern banquet table.

Jesus would have been at the curve of a U-shaped low slung couch. The men reclined at the table, resting on one elbow as they ate, with large pillows supporting them.

The Apostle John was seated next to Jesus on the left side.

⁴ Even Judas joined in the questioning (Matthew 26:25), as being the only silent one would have been incriminating.

Judas was seated next to Jesus on the right side, at the place of honor. The back of Jesus' head was next to Judas' chest.

We wonder, how was it that Judas occupied the place of honor?

Some suggest that Judas rushed to take the spot himself. To which I say, "*Maybe...*" But with what he had planned, I have a hard time seeing that. I think Judas would have preferred to have laid low on this night and at this meal.

Or it might be that the other guys put him at the place of honor because he took care of the money. My own thought is that Jesus placed him there to make possible the last exchange they would have.

The apostles wanted to know who the betrayer was. Simon Peter, who was reclining next to John, asked John to ask Jesus "the question."

[24] So Simon Peter nodded to that disciple and said to him, "Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking."

Because of the seating arrangements, John had the inside track to be able to engage in private conversation with the Lord.

[25] He then simply leaned back on Jesus' chest, and said to Him, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus responded, loud enough for at least John to hear.

[26a] Jesus then answered, "That man is the one for whom I shall dip the piece of bread and give it to him."

We might conclude that nobody besides John heard Jesus' comment. Maybe they all heard it. What is clear is that still, NOBODY suspected Judas, even as Jesus handed him the piece of bread.

Jesus' Release of the Betrayer (vv. 26b-30)

[26b] So when He had dipped the piece of bread, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

We wonder, "*What was Judas thinking as Jesus handed him the bread that had been dipped, either in the maror (bitter herbs) or the charoseth (sweet, made of nuts and apples)?*"

Whatever the mental state of the eleven - confused, stung by Jesus' revelation that one of them was a betrayer - Judas was not confused.

I think Judas heard Jesus' comment to John, whether anybody else heard it or not. I think he knew what taking the bread meant. I think He reached out and took the bread from Jesus, purposefully.

And, with the challenge accepted, Judas crossed a personal Rubicon.

Like Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon River into Italy was "*a point of no return*," Judas, by taking the bread stepped over a line from which there was no retreat.

We might say that this was the final surrender of his will to Satan. ***[27] After this, Satan then entered into him.***⁵

And with the passing of the bread, Jesus told him, loudly enough that everyone could hear, ***[27] "What you are doing do, do it quickly."***

But, again, since nobody suspected Judas of being the betrayer, everybody thought everything was fine.

They all thought that Jesus was telling Judas (the treasurer) to take care of something financial.

[28] Now none⁶ of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. [29] For some were assuming, since Judas kept the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy

⁵ This is the only time Satan is named in John's Gospel. We shouldn't think of Judas as a hapless victim to be pitied, as the demon-possessed often are in the Gospels. Judas is to be regarded as completely culpable for his actions.

⁶ It is hard for me to understand how John didn't know.

the things we need for the feast”; or else, that he was to give something to the poor.

The last verse of this section concludes the story of Judas’ defection. John writes ominously.

[30] So after receiving the piece of bread, he left immediately; and it was night.

It was dark outside, sure. More to the point, it was night in Judas’ soul. He has declared himself and has, finally, gone over to the other side.

And now, there are twelve men in the Upper Room. Jesus and His eleven believing disciples.

It is clear to us that on this night, for them, many things were very unclear.

They were not clear on who the betrayer was. They were not clear on many issues of discipleship. They were not clear on Jesus’ soon to come death.

But one thing they knew. They knew that Jesus loved them.

The great theme of this chapter is love. And we get to see the beautiful, loving, God-centered heart of Jesus in what He said immediately after Judas’ departure.

The Fragrant Aroma of Loving Honesty (vv. 31-38)

Jesus Models Love and Calls Us to Love (vv. 31-35)

The love of Jesus for His disciples (vv. 31-33)

Perfect alignment with God’s will (vv. 31-32)

[31] Therefore when he had left, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; [32] if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately.

Catch this: Judas’ departure prompted Jesus to exult in God’s soon glorification of Himself. This is the ultimate example of Jesus’ will being in perfect alignment with His Father’s will.

He is about to experience torture and torment, humiliation and rejection, suffering and death - and He sees all of that through the lens of God’s eternal plan. He understands that God will be glorified by it all, that He Himself will be glorified by it all - and gives glory to His Father for all that’s about to happen to Him.

That gives us a picture of Jesus’ God-centered, eternity-focused mindset.

We listen to what He says next and hear His tenderness and His passion to protect His followers.

Perfect love (v. 33)

[33] Little children, I am still with you a little longer. You will look for Me; and just as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’”

Jesus’ whole focus is on them. Not on Himself. He doesn’t speak to them about His coming crucifixion. He doesn’t talk about Judas. He pays attention to the eleven and to their needs.

He calls these full grown men **“little children.”** He equips them with truth. He informs them that He is about to leave. He tells them that they won’t be permitted / able to follow.

Then, He gave them marching orders.

The love of disciples for fellow disciples (vv. 34-35)

[34] “I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. [35] By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

On the one hand, this is nothing new. God had always taught that His people were to love each other.⁷ But the command here is “**new**” because it was to be a different quality of love.

Jesus’ disciples were to love each other according to the pattern they had seen in Him (Greek agape - *αγαπη*)⁸ over the three years they had been with Him.

It was the love that they will see played out on the very next day when He dies on the cross.

Jesus says that their love for each other will be their ID badge that they are His disciples, that they are following Him.

That was true then. It is still true now. Love defines discipleship.

In the Christian community in America, different people measure discipleship differently.

While nobody would say that love doesn’t matter, we might rank other things higher than love; like having a working knowledge of the Bible or maintaining a consistent devotional life.

Listen again to the words of Jesus:

[34] “I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. [35] By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Love for my brothers and sisters in Jesus is the litmus test that God has given the world by which it can judge if I, who believe in Him as my Savior, am following Him as my Lord.

If I, who believe in Jesus and therefore have eternal life, don’t love you who are my family in Jesus, then “**all people**” won’t know that I’m His disciple.

To love as Jesus loved is to love sacrificially. It is for me to act on behalf of you, for your benefit. It is for you to act on behalf of the other person, for their benefit.

Showing that kind of love is tough. Love is where the Christian rubber meets the road. Love requires an others-centeredness.

To love as Jesus loved demands personal involvement. Love is difficult because it is almost always too blasted inconvenient. It’s up close and personal.

Love demands that I be available to people at the time of *their* need, not *my* convenience.

And, to love as Jesus loved is costly. If you love, you will, from time to time, deplete your reserves of emotional energy, decrease your financial reserves, and fill up your available time slots.

Show me how to love without sacrifice, personal involvement and cost and I’ll sign up in a heartbeat. But loving the way Jesus loved can’t happen without sacrifice, personal involvement and cost.

Love can take all sorts of forms. It can take the shape of a prayer. It can take the shape of a wrench in the hand of someone fixing a plumbing leak or a broken-down car.

Love might mean lending a listening ear or providing a shoulder to cry on. Love will sometimes buy groceries, fix dinner, or write a letter. Love will invest time.

Love looks for ways to meet needs. It takes the initiative.

It is patient and kind and is not jealous. Love does not brag and is not arrogant. It does not act disgracefully, nor does it seek its own benefit.

⁷ Old Testament, too - see Leviticus 19:18.

⁸ In these verses, John referred to Jesus’ love by using a Greek aorist tense (point in time: the cross), while the disciples’ love for each other is in the present tense (ongoing, continual action).

Love is not provoked, and it does not take into account a wrong suffered. It doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth.

Love keeps every confidence, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. (From 1 Corinthians 13)

That kind of love is what Jesus calls us to live out. And we, who believe in Jesus, want to get a grip on what discipleship is all about, right?

Well, think LOVE.

Jesus said that groups of disciples and individuals within those groups will be ID'd as His disciples by their love for one another.

We could spend a lot of time here with Jesus and we'd really like to ask Him some follow-up questions. Like...

...What does love look like when brothers and sisters are leading overtly rebellious and disobedient lives?

...How do I love my spouse when he / she disrespects me?

...How do I love my friend when we get crosswise with each other about issues that are important to both of us?

Those are questions that we might have right now. I'd love to hear Jesus say more. What He would say would help me and you love each other better.

If love is the high water mark of discipleship, we want to make sure we get it right. Knowing how to love in this or that circumstance can be complicated.

So, we're not surprised when we keep reading, that Simon Peter followed up Jesus' New Commandment with a question. But we are surprised by the question he asked.

Jesus Modeled Loving Honesty - Even When It Hurt! (vv. 36-38)

Peter's non-loving question (v. 36a)

Immediately after Jesus gave the New Commandment, **[36a] Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?"**

Hmm... - NOT the question we were expecting.

No doubt, Jesus would have loved to have heard Peter ask Him something about love. Or, maybe to have affirmed, *"You bet, Lord. I'll give everything I have to love others the way You have loved me."*

But Peter's question had nothing to do with Jesus' New Commandment.

That's because he hadn't been fully engaged in Jesus' words about love. Peter hadn't been listening to all Jesus said about love because he was still stuck on Jesus' remark that He was not going to be with them very much longer.

You can almost hear the desperation in Peter's voice. He sounds like a frightened child about to lose a parent.

And notice. Jesus didn't blast Peter. Even with Peter's *non sequitur* of a question, He didn't say, *"Peter, you blockhead! Can't you stay on track? I've just given the New Commandment, for Heaven's sake!"*

Nope. Jesus just kept on loving. If nobody else was going to love the way He loved, He was at least going to keep loving the way He had always loved. That's who He was. That's what He did.

Gently, tenderly, He responded to Peter.

Jesus' reassuring answer (v. 36b)

[36b] Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

And to that response, Peter responded.

[37] Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow you right now? I will lay down my life for You."⁹

That was a strong, courageous claim. And Jesus knew better.

⁹ Here, Peter almost quoted the Good Shepherd passage from John 10.

Jesus' hard, loving words (v. 38)

[38] Jesus replied, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will now crow until you deny Me three times."

"Peter, you're not as loyal as you think you are. You aren't as strong as you think you are. You're overestimating your courage. Failure is just around the corner."

And get this: As hard as those words would have been for Peter to hear, they were loving words.

Honest words, words that tell friends the truth, are loving words. It is loving to tell people what they need to hear, not just what they want to hear.

So that's what Jesus did. Right at the end, He kept on modeling the love He was commanding by telling Peter the truth.

Conclusion:

On this Passover night, Jesus had a limited number of hours left to spend with His disciples. He put those hours to good use, dwelling only on the critical issues they would need to know when He was gone.

Over the next couple of weeks, we're going to focus on what He has to say about the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the need to "abide" in Him. Then we'll listen as He prays for them (and for us!).

Here, He called them and He calls us to a life of love. We are to love each other as He has loved us - sacrificially, with genuine personal involvement, at whatever cost is necessary.

Simon Peter ignored the New Commandment, moments after Jesus gave it. He let his neediness trump Jesus' command. Peter was being immature, and it is very tempting to follow in Peter's footsteps.

It is tempting for me to think that my personal needs outweigh my need to love you. You, too, will be tempted to see your needs as more important than your need to love.

Our call, though, is not to follow in the footsteps of Peter. God calls us to follow in the footsteps of His Son, Jesus.

Jesus' towering love is sandwiched between Judas' ugly betrayal and Peter's immature self-centeredness. If anyone ever had a reason to NOT love, it was Jesus. But He never wavered. Not once, not even a little bit.

Now, He calls each of us who have believed in Him for eternal life to follow Him into the life of discipleship as we love each other.

If we will do that, when those who watch us dip the litmus paper into the life they see, they'll know for sure that we are His disciples. We will have passed the discipleship "sniff test."

And this we can do. Not because we are somehow wonderful or strong, but because Jesus loves us, this we know.