

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Trustworthy

#### **Discipleship's Litmus Test**

(John 13:18-38)

Study #14

#### Introduction: The last things we talk about...

This morning, we are, again, listening in on Jesus' interactions with His disciples during a Passover meal in an upstairs room of a home in Jerusalem on the night before He died.

Jesus knew that these were the last significant hours He would have with these men before His crucifixion.

So, He chose the themes He would address with great care. That is what we would expect from someone with little time left.

If you've spent time with people who know that time is short - they have a busy schedule; they're moving soon; they are terminally ill - you know that it's often 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.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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 anyone. This Psalm, written by King David, probably refers

So, on this, Jesus' last night, the first topics He addressed were:  
(1) maintaining close relationship with Him by confession of sin.  
(2) servanthood.

Both were powerfully illustrated by way of foot-washing, and we aren't surprised that His next topic was love. Love will be our main theme today.

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

By washing His disciples' feet, Jesus showed them that He was willing to sacrifice His own comfort and reputation to serve them. It turns out that one of His followers was willing to sacrifice Jesus. This next scene is painful.

After the foot-washing, Jesus again reclined at the table with the group. He stunned them with a nightmarish revelation.

#### **The Ugly Stench of Betrayal (13:18-30)**

##### **Jesus' Stunning Announcement of a Betrayer (13:18-20)**

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

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

to the traitorous actions of Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor, who turned against him in the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 17)

<sup>3</sup> 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 completely trustworthy.

That psalm paints a picture of a trusted companion, a close friend who, for no apparent reason, kicks his friend in the face. The face-kicker, in this case, was the Apostle, 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 Judas will betray Him.

At this last meal with the Twelve, the prospects of the cross loomed large in Jesus' mind. On this night, He referred to His coming death repeatedly.

Added to that weight was the knowledge that one of the Twelve had already decided to turn Him over to those who wanted Him dead - and that must have hurt.

Yes, 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 for three solid years.

So, Jesus made the announcement. And, having announced the betrayal, He didn't drop the topic and move on to something else.

### **Jesus' [mostly hidden] Revelation of the Betrayer (13:21-26a)**

*A secret betrayer at the table (v. 21)*

***[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."***

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<sup>4</sup> Indira Gandhi knew that having enemies was a part of public life. She was the Prime Minister of India from the 1960's into the early 80's. She had enemies and she lived with that reality. To protect her against these enemies, Ms. Gandhi had a well-trained detail of trusted, personal bodyguards, who protected her, much as our Secret Service guards the President. Ms. Gandhi was betrayed and assassinated on October 31, 1984, by two of those men entrusted with her protection.

And immediately, eleven men were utterly confused.

Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, and Simon (the Zealot) had no idea what Jesus was talking about.

After all they had gone through, experienced, learned, seen, heard, and suffered, together, it was too much to believe that this could happen.

It would be like you, being a member of a sports team, heard your coach tell you and your teammates in a huddle with just seconds remaining in a close game that a member of the team was planning to throw the game. How unsettling.<sup>4</sup>

Having an enemy within the ranks of people you know and love is hard to bear - and we're amazed that none of them suspected Judas.

*Eleven apostles, trying to figure it out (vv. 22-26a)*

***[22] The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking.***<sup>5</sup>

From the four Gospel accounts, we know a bit about the seating arrangement at this Last Supper.<sup>6</sup>

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 one side. Judas was seated next to Jesus on the other side.

<sup>5</sup> Even Judas joined in the questioning (Matthew 26:25), as being the only silent one would have been incriminating.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

We find it curious that Judas was seated so near to Jesus. I wonder why...

Some suggest that Judas rushed to take the spot himself. I say, "Maybe..." - but with what he had planned, I have a hard time seeing that. I think Judas would have preferred laying 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. Just as likely is that Jesus placed him there to make possible the last exchange they would have.

We don't know why. We do know that Simon Peter wanted to know who the betrayer was. So, as he was seated next to John, Peter 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 have a private chat 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."***

It might be that nobody besides John heard Jesus' comment. Or maybe they all heard it.

What is clear is that still, NOBODY suspected Judas, even as Jesus handed Judas 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.***

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

I suspect that Judas heard Jesus' comment to John. I think he knew what taking the bread meant.

And, with the piece of bread accepted, Judas crossed a personal Rubicon from which there was no retreat.<sup>7</sup>

We might say that this - taking the bread - was the final surrender of his will to Satan. John writes, ***[27] After this, Satan then entered into him.***<sup>8</sup>

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

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

***[28] Now none<sup>9</sup> 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 the things we need for the feast"; or else, that he was to give something to the poor.***

<sup>7</sup> A reference to Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon River to move into the heartland of Rome for conquest. After this crossing, there was no turning back.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> It is hard for me to understand how John didn't know. Perhaps by "*none*" John means "*none of the rest...*" knew.

The last verse of this section concludes the story of Judas' defection. John wrote ominously.

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

Yes, it was dark outside. More to the point, it was *night* in Judas' soul.

With Judas' departure, there were now in that upper room eleven believing disciples, alone with Jesus. And 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 what it meant to follow Jesus. They were not clear on Jesus' soon to come death.

But Jesus made sure that they knew that pleasing God meant everything to Him.

### **The Fragrant Aroma of Love (13:31-38)**

#### **Jesus Modelled God-Centered Love (13:31-33)**

*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."***<sup>10</sup>

Jesus was just about to experience torture and torment, humiliation and rejection, suffering and death - and He saw all of that through the lens of God's eternal plan.

He understood that God would be glorified by it all and that He Himself would be glorified by it all. So, He gave glory to His Father for all that was about to happen to Him.

That gives the disciples - and us - a picture of Jesus' God-centered, eternity-focused mindset.

But they will see something else on this night. Listen to Jesus and you will hear tenderness. You will hear His passion to protect His followers.

The great theme of this section is love. And the eleven men with Jesus in the Upper Room knew beyond a shadow of doubt that Jesus loved them.<sup>11</sup>

*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 was on them. Not on Himself. He didn't speak to them about His coming crucifixion. He didn't talk about Judas. He paid attention to the eleven and to their needs.

He called these grown men "*little children*." In His eyes, this is what these men were on this night. He spoke to them as a parent speaks to a small child.

He equipped them with truth. He let them know that He was about to leave and that they couldn't follow.

Then, He gave them marching orders.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> This is actually the beginning of the formal "Upper Room Discourse." Someone has calculated that from here to the end of chapter 17, Jesus refers to His own death at least every five verses.

## Jesus Called His Disciples to a Life of Love (13:34-35)

*Not new, but new*

**[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.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, as Jesus gave the command, there was something **“new”** about it. It was new, *qualitatively*.

Jesus’ disciples were to love each other on the order of...  
...what they had seen in Him (Greek agape - *αγαπη*)<sup>13</sup> over the three years they had been with Him.  
...what they would see displayed on the next day when Jesus died on the cross for them.

By this, Jesus’ New Commandment, He clarified what would identify a Jesus-following disciple: Love. Love validates discipleship.

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

While nobody would say that love doesn’t matter, some 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:

*Loving as Jesus loved*

**[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.”**

Jesus told the men in that upper room that their love for each other would be their ID badge that they are His disciples, that they are following Him.

He says the same thing to us, today.

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 Jesus 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”** will know that while I may be saved, I’m not Jesus’ disciple.

There is so much we could say about love. Based on what we see in this exchange on Jesus’ last night, I’ll just say this.

To love as Jesus loved is to act for someone else’s benefit. It is for me to act for your good. It is for you to act for someone else’s good. This will most often be a tough assignment.

A commitment to love requires a whole life reorientation.

I’m no longer living to “fit in,” to gain approval, to be well-liked, or to avoid conflict. To live to love is to intentionally offer someone else what they need.

<sup>12</sup> Old Testament, too - see Leviticus 19:18.

<sup>13</sup> 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 requires a movement away from self to an others-centeredness, an others-awareness, an others-sensitivity...as we'll soon see.

Second, to love as Jesus loved demands personal involvement. To love is difficult because it is, by its very nature, up close and personal.

Love is, essentially, relational. It isn't necessarily extroverted or introverted or sanguine or melancholy. But it is relational. Again, as we'll see in a minute.

Finally, 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. You'll put yourself at risk, even the relationship at risk, as will become clear.

Loving the way Jesus loved can't happen without an outward, others-focus, without personal involvement, and without cost - and love can take all sorts of shapes and forms.

It can take the shape of a prayer, or 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 is on the lookout 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.

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.

It's here that we probably all wish we could spend some alone time with Jesus. We'd love to ask Him some follow-up questions.

*If we could have a Q&A with Jesus...*

Like...

...what does love look like when a brother or a sister is leading an overtly rebellious and disobedient life?

...how do I love my spouse when he / she disrespects me or takes me for granted?

...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.

If we could hear Jesus riff on those questions, it would help us know how to 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, as we keep reading, we're not surprised that Simon Peter followed up Jesus' New Commandment with a question...but his question isn't the question we might have expected him to ask.

## Jesus Modeled Honest Love (13:36-38)

*Peter's ill-fitting question (v. 36a)*

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

Huh?

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."*

Peter's question had nothing to do with Jesus' New Commandment because Peter hadn't been fully engaged in Jesus' words about love.

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.

But notice. Jesus didn't blast Peter. Even with Peter's non-starter 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's response is a Master Class on love.

If Peter or wouldn't - couldn't - fully enter into a life of love at this moment, Jesus was still going to keep loving the way He had always loved. That's who He was. That's what He did.

*Jesus' reassuring answer (v. 36b)*

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

Notice how Jesus immediately turned on a dime from His "New Commandment" to Peter's need, as expressed by Peter's question. Jesus quickly pivoted and focused on Peter.

Jesus' response was also intensely relational. He spoke directly to Peter; not to the group. He zeroed in on the individual in need.

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."<sup>14</sup>**

That was a strong, courageous claim. Jesus knew better, though, and He stuck a pin in Peter's bravado.

*Jesus' hard, honest, loving words (v. 38)*

**[38] Jesus replied, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not 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 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.

<sup>14</sup> Here, Peter almost quoted Jesus' own words from the Good Shepherd passage. (John 10)

Right up to the end, He was others-centered and was intensely relational in His love. The truth-telling love He gave to Peter cost Him His own comfort and ease.

Right up until the end, Jesus modeled the love He commanded.

### **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.

Jesus' command to us to love was sandwiched between Judas' ugly betrayal and Peter's immature self-centeredness.

So, love, we will. And love as Jesus loved, we can do. Not because we are wonderful or strong, but because we are perfectly loved, we can love. Jesus loves us, this we know.