

“Doing What Disciples Do”  
John 15:12-17

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The new pastor of a congregation preached his first sermon from the text, “Love one another.” The people were pleased. The next Sunday the pastor preached the exact same sermon from the exact same text, “Love one another.” The people were surprised. When the pastor preached the same sermon the third week from the same text, the people were angry. The Staff Parish Relations chairperson confronted the new pastor with the obvious question, “Why do you preach the same sermon every week?” The pastor replied, “When the congregation learns to practice this one, I’ll write a new one.”

Love, love, love, love. Discipleship in a single word is *love*. By the waters of baptism we are claimed as children of God and cleansed of our sin. By the rivers of life we are called to be faithful disciples and challenged to love one another.

“A new commandment I give you,” says Jesus, “Love one another as I have loved you.” What do disciples do? They love one another. Let’s talk some more about this. It is really important.

AS THE FATHER HAS LOVED ME, SO HAVE I LOVED YOU. ABIDE IN MY LOVE.

To *abide* is to remain, to linger, to tarry. We learn to love one another because we first have been loved by God. Love is an experience before it is an expression. One reason we are such feeble lovers of others is because we have yet to really grasp or experience the depth of God’s love for us. If we are going to love one another, the first thing we need to do is to abide in God’s love.

Abide in love. How can we do that? We get in touch with God’s love through WORSHIP. If worship were a matter of music, we could attend a concert. If worship were a matter of entertainment, we could go to a movie. If worship were a matter of excitement, we could go to a ball game. If worship were a matter of rest, we could stay home and sleep. But, worship is a meeting with God. It is the place where God and people get together. The longer I lead worship, the more I am convinced that if I am going to be a faithful disciple, I have to find ways and means to be consistent and persistent at worship. You cannot be a vital Christian if you do not find ways to be involved in worship. Worship is the heartbeat of faithful discipleship.

It was the middle of the day when Jesus first met her at the well. She came after others had gone to avoid the embarrassment that seemed so strong. In a casual conversation that shattered the conventions of the day, they discussed the nature

of worship. Where do you worship? How do you worship? What method and means of worship do you use? And, they talked about her life. She'd had so many husbands along the way. They talked about the intimate things of life as they cut across the culture of the day. Then Jesus said something to her that changed her life, "You drink of this water from this well and you will be thirsty again. But I want to give you water that is living water. It will be a well of water springing up from inside of you and you will never ever be thirsty again." That is what worship does for us. It gives us a spring of living water welling up inside our souls.

*Jesus says come to the water, stand by my side  
I know you are thirsty, you won't be denied  
I felt every tear drop, when in darkness you cried.  
And I've come to remind you, that for those tears I died.*

"It is written," said Jesus to Satan, "worship the Lord your God." Abide in love.

#### WE ABIDE IN LOVE THROUGH PRAYER

Prayer really does not change many things, but it changes us dramatically. Bobby was a regular guy who went to work and supported his family. One day Bobby started slipping into the church sanctuary on his way home from work and spending some time in prayer. Trying to be more helpful than he needed to be, a pastor approached Bobby and asked if he could assist. "No," said Bobby shyly, "I just like to come here where it is quiet to pray." "And what do you say in your prayers?" inquired the pastor, who often failed to pray himself. "Not much," said Bobby. "I just come in here and get quiet; clear my mind of the cares of the day. Then I say, 'Hi, God, this is Bobby.'" "What happens then?" asked the intruding pastor. "Not a whole lot," says Bobby. "I just stay put until I hear a voice in my heart say, 'Hi, Bobby, this is God!' Then I know everything is going to be all right and I go on home." The purpose of prayer is to be in the presence of God and to linger there long enough to know that we are loved. The longer I pray the less I ask and the more I listen.

Charles Wesley prayed this way:

*Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly,  
While the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is high,  
Plenteous grace with thee is found, grace to cover all my sin,  
Let the healing streams abound, make and keep me pure within.  
Abide in God's love.*

#### WE GROW UP IN EVERY WAY INTO CHRIST.

While childlikeness is a prerequisite for entering the kingdom of God, childishness is a telling sign of spiritual immaturity. All children, by nature, are self-centered. It is a matter of survival. Parents are not sure who will survive, they or the children.

I have watched many flower girls and ring bearers take charge of weddings by deciding to act out in front of the entire congregation. Children will be children.

Sandy and I were congratulating ourselves on being good grandparents, since our three-year-old grandson, Caleb, loves to visit us. In a moment of truth I said, “Why shouldn’t he? He comes to our house and gets absolutely anything he wants. Here we are, two adults who worship his every word, delight in his every action, and jump to his every wish. Who wouldn’t be happy in those kinds of circumstances?” Children are that way and it is okay. But what is okay at five is not okay at fifty. Faith that reduces God to Santa Claus and love that always seeks to get, is immature, at best, and unbearable, at its worst.

Paul said, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put away childish things.” Have you? Have I?

Abide in love. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. When we abide in love, we are empowered to ACT IN LOVE. Love is an action verb. It calls us to do things. Disciples do certain kinds of things because God loves them and we are called to love one another. There are many we might list, but let me suggest three.

**DISCIPLES PLAY FAIRLY.** When it comes to this game of life, we choose to play it fairly. We live The Golden Rule—Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

In the novel, The Yearling, men gathered around the store stove in the winter on most Saturday mornings and did a lot of bragging about their hunting dogs. Everybody expected everybody else to lie about his dog, so it really didn’t count as lying. One morning Penny Baxter began running his own dog down. “Sorriest old dog I ever owned,” complained Penny. “He ain’t worth a good twist of tobaccey.” Old Lemm Forrester smelled something suspicious. “I never heard a man run his own dog down that way,” thought Lemm. “Must be something special about that dog.” So the next day Lemm came over to Penny’s place with a fine new shotgun and asked Penny to trade it for the dog. “You don’t want that old dog,” said Penny. “He ain’t no good a’tall.” “I want what I want,” said Lemm. “Trade me this gun for him or I will come over and steal him.” That day they cut a deal. Penny Baxter had done Lemm Forrester in with a slick tongue. Later, Penny’s conscience got to bothering him. “My words were straight said,” reasoned Penny, “but my intentions were as crooked as the Ocklawaha River.” I told him the truth, but I set him up all the way.” Fair people don’t do those kinds of things. So, Penny goes over to see Lemm and comes clean with what he said. 1

Love needs fairness the way a river needs a bank or a body needs a backbone. Love is soft unless there is fairness in it to give structure and keep it straight. You and I will compromise ourselves again and again. Christian people play the game of life fairly. Fair people are even-handed, square-dealers, speak the truth in love, honor their commitments with a handshake. Love is not so much a feeling or a falling as it is a disposition and a determination to be a certain kind of person, a fair person. Disciples are fair.

### DISCIPLES DARE TO FORGIVE.

Yes, love does mean having to say you are sorry.

Yes, love does include your enemies.

No, love does not keep a record of wrongs.

No, love does not seek revenge.

Forgiveness is the oil that lubricates the human machine. Without it, all of life becomes hot and squeaky.

Joe got cheated out of a promised retirement about fifteen years ago. He knows for sure who did it. It was the new vice president in charge of personnel. Joe has never gotten over it. Everyone who has spent more than fifteen minutes with Joe has heard the story. Every taxi driver who has driven him more than two miles has heard it. The postman knows; the woman at the check-out counter knows. His rage has become his very being. Joe has become the bitterness that was done him one day. Forgiveness is never easy and it is not excusing, but it is absolutely essential if you are to keep from dying a bitter person. Disciples forgive because forgiveness fits faulty people. Jesus forgives us and so we forgive. Forgiveness sets us free. The person feeling free is the one doing the forgiving.

### DISCIPLES SEEK TO SERVE

As a single mother, she gets up 5:30 each morning and gets herself ready for work. She dresses her sleepy children, gets them a bite to eat, drops them off at day care and school, fights the morning traffic, hunts for a parking space, grabs a cup of coffee, slides behind her desk. For the day, she endures the petty office gossip and deals with fragile male egos in order to make enough money for her struggling family. She finds time to take her daughter to flute lessons and her son to T-ball practice, although she has little time for herself. What makes her do it? She loves her children. That is what love does. Love finds a way to do what needs to be done.

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, he gathered his disciples in an upper room. James and John were jockeying for position. Judas was cashing in while Peter was boasting, as usual. In the rush to get everything ready, a standard custom was omitted. There was no servant to wash their feet.

That night Jesus showed them the full extent of his love. He got up from the meal, wrapped a towel around his waist, filled a basin with water and began to wash the disciples feet. While Peter wanted to argue and the others were filled with awe, Jesus said, "I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, so you should also wash one another's feet." Love never stands taller than when it stoops to serve.

What do disciples do? They play fair in this thing called life. They learn to forgive, even as they have been forgiven. They stoop to serve the people around them. That is what disciples do.

Whose feet are you symbolically called to wash this week? Whom do you need to forgive? In the big game of life, do you always play fair?

*They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love.*

Many of us who call ourselves *Christian*, long to become what we call ourselves.

Amen.

## NOTES

1. Lewis Smedes, A Pretty Good Person: What It Takes to Live With Gratitude and Integrity or When Pretty Good is Good Enough, Harper Collins, New York, 1990.











