

Becoming ... One With Each Other

May 21, 2017

Scripture: John 14:15-21

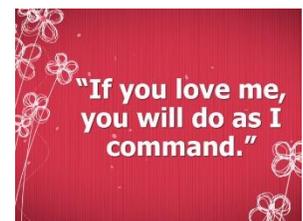
¹⁵ Jesus said to his disciples: If you love me, you will do as I command. ¹⁶ Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. ¹⁷ The Spirit will show you what is true. The people of this world cannot accept the Spirit, because they don't see or know him. But you know the Spirit, who is with you and will keep on living in you.

¹⁸ I won't leave you like orphans. I will come back to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the people of this world won't be able to see me, but you will see me. And because I live, you will live. ²⁰ Then you will know that I am one with the Father. You will know that you are one with me, and I am one with you. ²¹ If you love me, you will do what I have said, and my Father will love you. I will also love you and show you what I am like.



When we gathered here at the table last week, we talked about how Jesus offered Himself to His disciples that night and about how Jesus seeks to offer Himself to us as well.

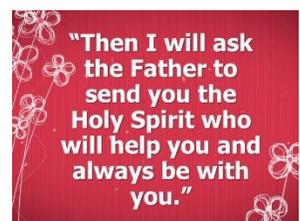
Jesus desires to be one with each of us. He invites us in. He draws us into Himself and into the larger body of Christ. All this is done through His work and power alone; we are made one with Him once we say 'yes' to the invitation. Once we say 'yes' to Jesus, then we begin to follow Him. Jesus explained what this would look like. In verse 15 He said, "*If you love me, you will do as I command*".



Love. It is a big word. Today, as we look at becoming one with each other, love will be at the center of it all. Let us pray.

Our love for one another hinges upon our love for God and for Jesus. That is why the first commandment was to love God and the second was to love neighbor. Jesus did expand on the second commandment when He added, "as I first loved you". He was clarifying in one way, expanding what love meant in another way. Jesus made it clear how we are to love God. He said we are to love God with ALL of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. With all we are. In today's scripture, it ties back into the idea that "*you will obey my commands*". Jesus was saying, in essence, "If you love me, you will follow me. If you love me, you will obey my commands". The first commandment was to love God. That is what becoming one with Christ is all about. When we love God with all we are, then we become one with Christ. That is how He loved God and others. It is the love He calls us to live out as well.

As their time at the table continued, Jesus turned the conversation to the time when He would no longer be with them physically. Jesus loved those around the table with Him and He wanted to give them some assurances that it would be alright after His death and resurrection. To offer them peace and comfort and some reassurances Jesus tells them, in verses sixteen and seventeen, "*Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. The Spirit will show you what is true*". Jesus promises the disciples an ever-present Spirit that will help and guide them and will show the disciples what

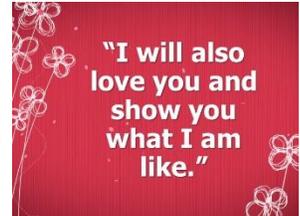


is true. For the disciples, they have experienced this Spirit presence already. When Jesus sent them out two by two to preach and heal, His power went out with them. These disciples experienced what it was like to go forth with Jesus' Spirit within them. They healed the sick and proclaimed that the kingdom of God was near. It was the Spirit in them that allowed them to do amazing things in the name of God. Although you and I may not know the power of healing someone in Jesus' name, we do know what it is like to have the presence of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. The Spirit's guidance, protection, conviction, and encouragement are of immeasurable value in our faith.



Jesus goes on in verse twenty to explain to the disciples what it will be like to live with Jesus' Spirit in them. Although they do not fully understand the resurrection and victory over sin and death that Jesus will achieve shortly, they soon will. When He promises to not leave them but to dwell in them in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is a promise that will be realized very soon. When Jesus says, "*because I live, you will live*" He is painting the picture of what it will be like to have the Holy Spirit as a living presence within each of them. It is a presence we live with each day as well. The power of the Holy Spirit is a tangible part of our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. From the whispers to the nudges to the conviction to the encouragement to the reminders, the Spirit is a great gift to our walk of faith.

Jesus then returns to the concept of obedience to make a definite connection between loving God and loving Jesus and how we experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In verse 21, Jesus says, *"If you love me, you will do what I have said, and my Father will love you. I will also love you and show you what I am like"*. As we spend time in the Word of God, we do see what Jesus' love looks like. For all He met, Jesus held love at the center. We see how to *"love as He first loved us"* when we look at the ways that Jesus loved others. He always sought to give instead of take. He always sought to serve instead of being served. He sought to love through both words and actions. Jesus sought to love by continually finding ways to give Himself to others. In this way, Jesus showed us what He was like and He gave us the examples to live by as we seek to share God's love with our world.



In a small, dusty town in western Oklahoma one November there lived a young single mother struggling to make ends meet. She worked as many hours as she could at a local convenience store, barely making enough to get by. After work she would take care of her small child and assist an elderly relative who lived in the same town, occasionally running errands and buying groceries. It was nearing Thanksgiving and the young mother felt a need to help others growing strong in her heart. She called local charities and finally found a cause she could give her time to.

A nearby nursing home needed someone to style residents' hair that day. After much argument with her boss who did not want to allow her time off work to

volunteer, she won her case and set off on Thanksgiving morning to the nursing home. In the hallway outside the room where she styled their hair, residents lined up. Some were in wheelchairs, some were in beds, some weren't even awake. Most talked very little if at all, as she styled their hair to look nice for that special day, some for family visits, many for no one at all. With just a few hours of her time, she brightened many lives by giving of her time and talents. Asked later why she was willing to go through so much to serve, she replied, "I just needed to give. I made them happy that day. I made a difference."

In this story, we see what it can look like to give instead of take, to serve instead of wanting to be served. Love was at the center of her act of service. It is how Jesus loved the disciples. It is how Jesus loved the poor, the orphans, the naked, the hungry, the blind, the leper, the outcast, the possessed. This struggling, single mother chose to sacrifice of her time and her wages to go and serve those who many do not see. Why? Because she sensed this inner need to give to others. Her reward? "I made a difference that day". Deep within each of us, we have this need too. We all want to matter. We all want to make a difference in our world.



As the body of Christ, there are many ways that we can become one with each other. For many of us, the primary way we do this is on a Sunday morning in worship. Here we experience a sense of community and fellowship. For many in our church, a small group is also a primary way that they grow closer to their fellow believers as they also grow in their own faith. And for many, we volunteer our time on

one of the various committees or teams that are the backbone of the church. Those nice, new handicap accessible bathrooms would still be a dream if it were not for the planning and organization and the sweat and labor of the Trustees.

The Trustees are just one shining example of what it looks like to show their love of God through service to this church. That group truly honors their commitment to the church through their diligence and steadfast participation in the work of their team. Allow me to digress for a moment. Truth be told, I wish more of our teams and committees were as dedicated as the Trustees are. I have attended almost every committee and team meeting since arriving last July. While a few are well-attended and do a great job, many meetings and gatherings are not well attended. This is not to say that all do not do a good job. I am very pleased with the work of all of our committees and teams. Those who are there month in and month out do a great job. However, there are a lot of people who are not honoring the commitment they made to serve their church. Many meetings have five or six members in attendance – a few short of the nine or more on each committee or team. Not only does this inhibit the work that can be accomplished, it also places an unfair burden on those that some of you volunteered to serve alongside. So, if you volunteered to be a part of the work of our church but have been less than faithful in honoring your commitment, I implore you to rededicate yourself to your committee or team. Moment of privilege over.

As Jesus knew, time together with His disciples built a great bond between them. They went everywhere together for almost three years. They experienced the

joys and sorrows of ministry as a team. And just as much as Jesus offered to those He healed and taught and loved, those disciples received just as much. He built a team that would rock the world. He built a team that would take the good news eventually to the ends of the known earth. By the time they parted ways, I would wager that many of the disciples were finishing each other's sentences. I would guess they also knew each other's greatest dreams and deepest fears. They cheered for each other when they had successes and they cried with each other when they had failures. Time together built tight bonds. The twelve disciples were the world first 'small group'.

And for us, truth be told, we too grow together when we spend time together. It can be on Sunday morning, it can be in a small group. While I value these activities deeply in my journey of faith, I have found that I grow together best with my fellow believers when I am part of a team serving together. Whether it is on a mission trip to some distant place or gathering together to offer a street meal to the homeless or going over to Tree of Life to complete a project, when we jump in together and pour all we have into serving others, then we become one with each other. In these settings we have time to get to know one another and to know one another in deeper, more connected ways. When we work alongside one another and spend time serving others together, we bond in deeper ways.

As our church presents short-term opportunities over the next few months to serve others in our community and region, it is my hope and prayer that you will make the choice to be involved in making a difference together with each other

and with Jesus Christ. For some of us, maybe it will be through serving at our VBS here in a couple of weeks or at the Iowa VBS in July. For some, maybe it will be by serving as a part of the Fellowship meals that our church will soon offer to the community. For some, it will be by serving at the Banquet in Sioux Falls this August. For some, it may be by serving in some capacity at the community worship service in the park that we are planning for August 13th. And for some, maybe it will be serving in a ministry that is yet to be launched but has been percolating in your heart. Each of these opportunities to serve has the same intent: to help us become one with Christ, to become one with each other, and to share our faith with the world in need.

Jesus led by example. Through the study of the Word and our participation as His hands and feet in the world, Jesus continues to lead you and I. His example and teachings lead us to become one with each other as we continue to become more and more one with Him. The power of the Holy Spirit enables and strengthens us to be of service to each other and to the world out there. May the power of the Holy Spirit be with each of you as you seek to be Jesus' hands and feet in the world this week. May we each have open hearts and willing hands as the Spirit prompts us to be one with each other. Let us pray.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) If Jesus were to evaluate your 'obedience' – where would He rate you on a scale of 1 to 10 (high to low)? How could you 'raise' your score?
- 2) How do you experience the Holy Spirit leading and guiding you in your day to day life? In your call to be of service to others?
- 3) Where do you have a passion for others? When do you feel God's pull on your heart strings? How can this become a ministry for you?