

*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

You are my friends if you do what I command you.

*No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing;
But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.
You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit
and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

These things I command you so that you will love one another.

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

*If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world,
but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master'.

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

*Whoever hates me, hates the Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did,
they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.*

But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

And you will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning

John 15:12-27

"You Are My Friends If You Do What I Command You"

Pastor Stephen Ridge

In our passage this morning we rejoin Jesus and the disciples, now out on the slopes of Mt. Olive on the night of the Last Supper. They had left the Upper Room and passed through the city gate to walk along the hillside opposite the city wall, likely hoping to be met by a fresh breeze and some cool air on this last night they would spend together in Jesus' company. Early on, I imagine, they had found themselves in a vineyard and Jesus had rehearsed for them a seven hundred year old song first sung by Isaiah. *"My Beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill...Let me sing for my Beloved a love song about his vineyard."* Isaiah had sung.

So Jesus had taught his disciples that God was planting a new vineyard that night. *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."* Jesus had taught them. *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* Jesus had said. He was teaching his friends, and us, that it was both possible and necessary for us to *abide* to stay close to him, even though the days they could physically see and hear and follow him were drawing to a close.

And this morning he goes on to teach us what the implications of our abiding in him will be. *"This is my commandment,"* Jesus said, *"that you love one another as I have loved you."* Jesus has just invested the last three years of his earthly life living in the company of men and women who, like him, had left their lives, their homes, their jobs, their families to be together with Jesus and each other. So now Jesus is teaching them that the closeness he taught them, the commitment he made to them would need to continue. *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."*

This is not to say that abiding in Jesus will require all of us to abandon all of the everyday relationships and responsibilities and commitments that grow up around us as we make our way through life. The men and women in Jesus' entourage lived in a special moment in history and were bound by a special call to that One Man whose teaching and miracles and sacrifice would save the world. But it does mean that the relationships and commitments we make at church and in God's kingdom be something more than the casual clubhouse associations we so often allow them to become. Jesus called us to *"love one another as I have loved you."*

And Jesus defined the intensity of that love by laying down his life for *"his friends,"* and for us. And he went on to define the terms by which we could become his friends. *"You are my friends if you do what I command you."* And the point here is that to throw in with Jesus is to buy in to a relationship that evolves. *"No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing."* It was normal in old Israel for the disciples of a rabbi to perform whatever menial tasks the rabbi needed done, and there are hints throughout the gospels that Jesus' men and women did precisely that for him.

But now Jesus stuns the men standing around him by putting his relationship with them on entirely different terms, *"But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."* It was not unusual in the ancient world for a man in authority to take as his best friend a slave who had demonstrated trustworthiness and loyalty over time. And Jesus has just offered all his disciples, and all of us, the opportunity to forge a relationship like that with him. David wrote in Psalm 25, *"The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him...he makes known to them his covenant."*

He goes on to lay out for them the foundation on which this "friendship" stands. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..." Jesus told them. Before our Scripture Lesson this morning, we sang "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus." It's an appropriate song to sing after a baptism because, to get baptized, we should decide to follow Jesus. But Jesus is teaching each of us here is that "I" am not the prime mover in my own salvation. The Bible teaches from cover to cover that none of us really hears the gospel, none of us wants, or seeks, or loves, or knows God unless he chooses us, unless his Spirit awakens our minds and softens our hearts, and then we hear the gospel and decide to follow Jesus.

The faith that brought us here this morning, the faith that prompts us to stop before a busy day and open our Bibles to listen and our hearts to pray, that faith is a gift from God, not the product of any innate nobility that any of us possesses. And, Jesus promises us, if we have that faith, got that gift, God will see to it that our lives will "bear fruit," Jesus said, "and that your fruit will abide." The real miracle of these talks Jesus had with his friends on Mt. Olive that night is that thousands of years later, thousand of miles away we still listen to these words. Nothing about the forlorn, confused, undistinguished men around Jesus suggested they could found a movement that would grip the hearts of countless people on every continent over the centuries.

And it is even more a miracle when we consider how counter cultural, counter intuitive the teachings of Jesus are to the worldly, successful people we try to reach with his gospel. "If the world hates you," Jesus told his men, "know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." One of the reasons Jesus is so insistent that we love one another is that, if we really belong to him, if we really stand for a way of life founded in heaven, we will find ourselves at odds with most people around us.

Try telling a religious enthusiast that he or she is not the hero of his or her own story, that all of us are helpless sinners entirely dependent on God's Spirit to choose us and move us in a direction where God can use us, and that only if we're willing to fail and be weak. Try telling people in our society that every unborn child is sacred, made in the image of God and should not be exterminated no matter how tragic and difficult the implications of the child's birth may be. Try telling a desperate mother or a heedless father that God will give them the grace to raise their child if only they will trust and obey him.

Try telling people in our society that we are what God made us at birth, that we are not at liberty to shake our fists at God's design and to redefine love and marriage and family and our own sexual identity. Try telling a religious bigot that the gospel really teaches that we should treat sexually confused and broken people with love and grace like Paul did in Corinth so that many of them turned from sin and followed Christ and found forgiveness and love and healing and wholeness.

Say those things to people and what you'll buy for your troubles is a typhoon of hatred, just like the one Jesus bought when he told old Israel's priests and rabbi's that they'd missed the point, and that God was about to love and forgive and heal and use people whether or not they sacrificed at Israel's temple or worshiped at Israel's synagogues. Old Israel had run its course and now the future belonged to Jesus, he taught them standing there in carpenter's clothes. And they showed him the way to a Roman cross.

The men standing around Jesus, in whatever orchard they had stumbled into, would spend the rest of their lives bearing "witness," Jesus said, to a way of life that makes perfect sense in heaven despite the outrage it would stir when they taught in this world. But they would not be alone in the typhoon that their gospel would provoke. The "Spirit of truth" that "Helper," Jesus had promised them would bear them through the storms that a gospel from heaven always raises whenever it gets spoken out loud.