

**DOING WHAT DISCIPLES DO:
“LOVE”**

John 15:9-17

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Nearly 30 years ago, Keith Miller wrote a book entitled “Please Love Me!” It told the story of a woman Keith met at a party and her life-long struggle with betrayal and heartbreak. What the reader doesn’t know is that another person’s story is lurking between the lines. This person, too, is looking for love in all the wrong places and crying out for help. This person is Keith Miller himself, a best-selling author of Christian books and church renewal expert who traveled around the country telling others how to be Christian.

The hunger to love and be loved is no respecter of persons or reputations. It may be the cry of a prostitute or a pastor, a teacher or a movie star, a CEO or a sports hero. Since Jesus understands that, he tells his disciples, “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.*”

LOVE IS AN EXPERIENCE

Love is an experience before it is an expression. So let me ask you. Are you living as a loved child of God?

To be loved is to be chosen. To be chosen is to be picked, selected, wanted, desired, adopted, claimed, singled out, set aside. The need to be chosen causes pastors to run for bishop, teenagers to try out for sports teams, politicians to seek elections, and employees to work for promotions. It is a good feeling to be chosen, and a raw feeling to be overlooked, passed by, done in, ignored, neglected.

“*You did not choose me, but I chose you*” (John: 16). According to Mr. Wesley, there is no divine election in the commonwealth of God. All are elected. All are chosen. You are wanted. Grace is free. Whosoever will may come.

So, if you are sitting here in this Sanctuary feeling like you don’t belong, that God is not interested in you, that you have been left out of any divine plan, you are wrong. Jesus is calling you. Why don’t you come home?

To be loved is to have a friend. How was it Joseph Scriven put it? “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!” Jesus is not just a friend of saints. He’s a friend of sinners too.

To Judas, who is about to betray Him; to Peter, who is about to deny Him; to the other ten, who are about to desert Him; Jesus says, “*I do not call you servants any longer; the servant does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends*” (John: 15).

A friend is that unique person who asks “How are you?” and then stays around long enough to hear the answer. A friend is that rare person who comes in when the rest of the world is going out. St. Augustine said, “A friend is someone who knows everything about you and loves you anyway.” A Gallop poll revealed that about 94% of Americans believe in God, but only about 23% consider God to be a friend. You’ve got a friend.

To be loved is to abide in Christ. “*Abide in my love.*” God does not love his children every now and then. He loves us with a love that will not end. God’s love is everlasting, unconditional, and unending.

Now, I need to speak to someone who wrote me an anonymous letter a few weeks ago. You told me you were abused by an alcoholic father and lived in fear as a child. You told me that you left home at 18 and found life to be difficult. When everything was dark, you asked God to show you one good person and it was that night you saw Jesus in a dream and felt loved. When you heard me say in a sermon a few weeks ago that “Jesus loves me, this I know,” you were reminded of that dream. You want to know that love and have others understand that love. Well, let me say to you and hundreds of others like you, God is love. God does love you. God can heal our wounded hearts. You can abide in love.

LOVE THAT HAS BEEN EXPERIENCED NATURALLY BECOMES AN EXPRESSION

So Jesus says, “*This is my commandment. Love each other.*” When God commands us to love one another, he gives us the power to do it!

To love is to treat others fairly. The golden rule is still golden. “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” I am concerned that after 9/11 we have sunken from justice to revenge. Is fear causing us to falter from our long held values as a country?

General Omar Bradley from the ranks of WWII says, “The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom and power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.” Are we seeing a new wave of racism and profiling sweeping across America as we struggle to find a just solution to illegal immigration? Have the cultural and political divisions among Americans destroyed our civility toward one another diminishing healthy debate into high volume demonizing? What if we started right here, right now, in this little corner of the world, “doing unto others as you would have others do unto you?” Would it make any difference?

To love is to forgive freely. *“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”* Do we believe that? Forgiveness is an empowered form of giving. It does not change the past; it only opens the door to a better future. Forgiveness is setting a prisoner free and discovering the prisoner is you.

Joe got cheated out of a promised retirement about 15 years ago. He knows for sure who did it. It was the new vice-president in charge of personnel. Everyone who has spent more than 15 minutes with Joe has heard the story. Every taxi driver who has driven him more than 2 miles has heard it. The postman knows; the woman at the check out counter knows. His rage has become his very being. Joe is his bitterness. Do you want to live a life of hate? Then learn to forgive.

To love is to become compassionate. Jesus said, *“Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate”* (Luke 6:36).

On the surface compassion seems easy. Who is not touched with emotion to see people running from burning buildings, sitting on roof tops, pleading for help, or clinging to trees in some far away tsunami? It is easy to be touched with such trauma and grief. Is this compassion?

Compassion comes from two words com meaning “with,” and passion meaning “suffering.” Compassion is to suffer with another. It is not a feeling of detached pity, but sharing the pain.

Henri Nouwen says, “Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, powerless with the powerless.” Compassion is not among our most natural responses. What we really desire is to make it in life, to get ahead, to be first, to be different. We want to forge our identities by carving out for ourselves niches in life where we can maintain a safe distance from others. We do not aspire to suffer with others. We desire to stay away from the pain.

So, we might rightfully ask, “In what condition our compassion might be?” Are we willing to sacrifice, suffer with, enter the pain, and endure the anxiety that is all around us? If every soldier that went to Iraq felt like our son or daughter, if every child that starved to death felt like flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, if every murder and every rape became one of our family, I wonder how much we would tolerate and how involved we might become to stop it?

The story goes that Abraham Lincoln was riding home from church one Sunday discussing the sermon he had just heard. “The Reverend was well prepared,” said Lincoln. “He had a thoughtfully constructed sermon, but it lacked its most important ingredient. The preacher never asked us to do anything great.”

Today, I am going to ask you to do something great. Love one another.