

How Do We Love Jesus?

A sermon by David Roquemore

First Presbyterian Church, Newton, NC

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John 14: 15-21

Here we go. Right after the passage we read last week, the one from which we take so much comfort at funerals, Jesus goes and does it. He says, “love one another. If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” And what are those commands? That you love one another!

Thanks, Jesus! That’s just so easy to live up to! So easy to do!

I mean, frankly, there are a lot of people I don’t want to love.

The homeless. The mentally-ill. The ones who determine to live weird lifestyles, you know, with the piercing and strange colored hair — no one here today has blue hair, right? Or pink? My college roommate and I were in a grocery store in lower Manhattan on a Sunday morning, when a person walked by with a big purple mohawk. He said, “I keep forgetting that here, *we* are the weird looking ones.” Did you ever feel like that? Then you know what it is to be challenged. We are called to love all these weird people, with their weird lifestyles and weird habits. Why can’t everything just be like it used to be?

There was a time when it was like that, maybe. I know we remember it that way. I am not sure that it was. But at any rate, what was once hidden is now out there. The world is different, and we have to get used to it. And we are called to love the world, and those in it, however weird they may be, with the fierce love of Jesus.

It is hard, yes. But the love of Jesus comes to us with a support system. We are not alone; the Spirit of God is with us. The Spirit will enable us to love even the most unlovable people.

I think of Mother Teresa: she did that, she loved the most unlovable people. The lepers. The very sick. The people that no one else would touch, she touched. My daughter Madeline will tell you about working with the prostitutes in Australia and I think in India, where they would go in and give these women foot massages and talk to them. These were women whom no one would talk to, no one would take seriously, who never got a gentle touch, or any love. And they would go in and just listen to them, hear their stories. And share the love of Jesus with them. People who society rejected as unlovable.

So, what does this mean?

One thing it means: we are not the world's policemen. We are not the church's policemen. We don't have to make everything and everybody believe just like us. It might be nice if they did, but they don't and probably won't. So we can let that go. Similarly, we are not responsible for others' behavior. We don't have to make them

conform to whatever we think. All we have to do is love them. (That's hard enough, right?)

Another thing it means is that we just bring the love of Jesus to them and see what happens. We aren't responsible for others' reactions to it. We just bring it, share it. We are conduits for the love of God for humanity.

See, I don't think God is going to haul us before the bar and say, "why didn't you convert those people on the corner?" But God might ask, "did you show them any love?" There's a difference. It's finally the Spirit's job to bring them into God's kingdom.

This is how we love Jesus: we show his love to the people. In the immortal words of one progressive baptist preacher, Clarence Jordan, "We'll worship the hind legs off Jesus, but never do a thing he says." That does no good, which is Jordan's point. We can't just worship God and go home feeling good. We have to love not just the people who show up here, but all the people.

There is hope for those feeling lost, though! Jesus goes on to say, "I will not leave you orphaned." The older Revised Standard Version translated that as "I will not leave you desolate," I remember holding onto that verse as a college freshman, in the middle of trying to figure out where I was going in life. Jesus will not leave us like desolate orphans, living on the streets and wondering what is next. No, he will call us to him and care for us. You can be sure of that.

But we go through life fighting depression, worrying about things we can't control, trying to "be our best self" and all of that. It is a struggle, this living life. Here Jesus says he will not leave us desolate; instead he will be with us. He goes out of his way to demonstrate that he will be with us, that the Spirit will walk with us, that the Father himself will be with us: we will not be alone, nor left orphaned.

You can take comfort in that, refuge in that; as you cope with whatever plagues you, whatever ails you, whatever torments you, know that Jesus is right there with you. Life doesn't have to be a fight — you can stop punching and start living with Jesus the Prince of Peace, who wants to give you peace.

One thing that John makes very clear in this part of his gospel, and in all of it, really, is that Jesus and the Father are very closely and intimately related. You can sure that whatever Jesus does and says receives the Father's blessing.

So when Jesus calls us to speak for him, we are doing so in the Father's will, with his blessing also. There is a caveat: we have to be careful that we are actually doing and saying what Jesus calls us to do. But when we are, we are acting on his behalf, and so, we are acting on God's behalf. That is what we are called to do: act on God's behalf — for the world!

I don't think we ever get it perfectly right — sin always comes in to mess with us. But for the most part, we are called to speak for Jesus, and so for the Father.

So when we love the world, we act on God's behalf. We do what God wants us to do, and what He would do. How does God love the world? Concretely; he does it through our actions.

Take this love, the fierce love of Jesus, and go out and love everybody — without exception. Even the ones who try to cheat you or attack you: love everybody. Then you are loving God!

Thanks be to God! Amen.