

Easter 5

John 13:31-35 – How Do You Recognize Jesus' Disciples?

May 1-3, 2010 by: Pastor Wessel

**John 13:31-35** – <sup>31</sup>When he [Judas] was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.

<sup>32</sup>If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

<sup>33</sup>"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

<sup>34</sup>"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

**Introduction** – How would you recognize a construction worker? Although not always the case, many people think of construction workers wearing hard hats and brightly colored and reflective vests. They need to protect their heads and they need to be visible.

How would you recognize someone who is an employee of McDonalds? They wear a uniform that identifies them as an employee of McDonalds, right? How about a Milwaukee Bucks player? We may not recognize them out in public (although if we have seen the player in a game, we may recognize that person.) We could recognize him when he is playing, because he will have a uniform with his name on.

It's pretty easy to figure out a person's job if they are on the job, but if they are off the job, you might have no idea what the person does. People don't advertise their employment 24 hours a day.

But what about a disciple of Jesus Christ? A disciple is really a student of the teachings of Jesus Christ. A student might look like everyone else in many ways, but as a student of God's Word learns more and grows in knowledge and faith, there must be some way to identify a student of Jesus Christ.

**Theme: How do you recognize Jesus' disciples?**

### **Part I: Jesus' disciples are the ones gathered around him, eager to hear him teach**

The Apostle John gives us the privilege of gathering with 11 of Jesus' disciples today on an emotional Thursday evening. Judas had gone to meet those who plotted with him in his betrayal so that they could arrest the rabbi from Nazareth. It was a day that we remembered a month ago on April 1<sup>st</sup>, just before our celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

What wonderful teachings the disciples heard from Jesus that evening. Some very important teachings that are part of the foundation of our faith.

<sup>31</sup>When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. <sup>32</sup>If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

The Father of all Creation would be glorified by the work of his Son Jesus Christ, by the Son of God's willing sacrifice for our sins. That sacrifice demonstrates to us how intense God's love for us really is. Jesus Christ would be glorified by God his Father when Jesus' work was clearly shown as the only Way for people in our lost world to enter the eternal peace of God and to enjoy the resurrection to eternal life.

<sup>33</sup>"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

No one could follow Jesus to the cross and the suffering of hell. Jesus would have to endure suffering for the sin of the world all alone. The salvation of sinners was carried out and the promise of eternal life offered by God to all who would believe in the work of his Son.

What difficult words those students of Jesus the Rabbi heard. Back and forth between sadness and the thrill of Jesus' promise. Sadness at the fact that Jesus emphasized he was going away but the thrill of joy at hearing about the love of God that sent his Son to save us. In these few verses, such depth of emotion, such profound statements, such loving guidance for us in our lives. Doesn't it make you eager to hear more? Are we always eager to hear God's Word?

Unfortunately we may not always be eager disciples of Christ, eager students of his Word. Yet, out of love for us, the Holy Spirit continues to provide people in our lives who proclaim God's Word to us. We continue to hear about our deep need for a Savior, hear that we are sinners who have been unfaithful, misguided, and deceived by so many lies, and have so often given in to the temptations of our sinful flesh. We continue to hear that Christ has taken away the punishment of our sin and has freed us from the curse of eternal death. The Holy Spirit enlightens us with the Word of God, helping us to see which paths lead away from God and which paths follow in his footsteps.

Do we always take the time to gather around God's Word, like people out in the cold gather around a fire for warmth? Do we always see God's Word as the center of our life, the core of who we are and how we think? We may not

always. We often consider it a luxury to take time and sit down and be a disciple, a student of God's Word instead of recognizing it for what it is – the most important treasure of our life, by which everything is judged to be true or false.

Yet God continues to “take time” for us and provides us opportunities day after day after day. The truth of God's Word is more readily available to us than ever in human history. We can read it, we can listen to it on our *i-pods*, we can watch it portrayed on videos, we can search it on the Internet. There are Bible Dictionaries and Bible Concordances and study Bibles that cross reference different parts of the Bible, so that we can build on the foundation that we receive in a basic study of God's Word, where we study the Apostles' Creed, the Sacraments, the 10 Commandments, the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus had many things to teach his disciples on that Thursday evening. He has many things to teach you today about your life, your responsibilities, and especially about your sin and the new life he freely gives you.

God's Word does not change. But your life changes. It changes every day, throughout your life. Some of the changes are easy to deal with and some of them are very difficult. The truth of the Bible is the foundation for your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. As you change and the world changes and your family changes, take time to see what the unchanging truth of the Bible has to say to you. See how much God really cares for you, no matter what this life sets in front of you. He will guide and sustain you.

## **Part II: Jesus' disciples are the ones whose faith in him shows itself with love**

For many years, the Christian Church has labeled the Thursday night when Jesus ate the Last Supper and was arrested with the name Maundy Thursday. That is because of the Latin phrase *mandatum novum* – “the new command.”

We hear from Jesus the new command: “*Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*” That command puts on our shoulders an overwhelming responsibility, but also an opportunity, a joy, and a privilege as disciples of Jesus. Jesus does not mean to tell us that before that moment it wasn't necessary for people to love each other. In fact, love is clearly the summary of all of God's law. The 10 commandments tell us that we ought to love God with perfect love and love those around us with the same type of love.

The new command is not commandment #11, but it is a directive from our Lord and Savior. It is “new” because the love Christ talks about has both its power and its perfect example in the love of Christ himself – a love that he was about to clearly demonstrate to his disciples by willingly offering himself as payment for the sins of the world.

Jesus gave a lot of guidance to his disciples on that Thursday evening. At the heart and core of it all was love. What is love? People have struggled with that word throughout history. We say we love when we eagerly want something or someone. We say a mother and father love their children. We say that siblings love each other.

Love is very emotional but we would not say it is just an emotion, because emotions are like moods – they change frequently. But you would expect that real love would be constant and not change. There are human examples of love and then there is the perfect example of Christ and his love.

What type of love did Christ have for us that we also ought to have so that people can recognize us as his disciples? 1 Corinthians 13 demonstrates it well: “*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Does that sound like the love that Christ has shown to us? It is love that is essentially humble, considering the needs of others as being more important than one's own needs. It is self-sacrificing, self-giving, eager to do good rather than worrying about the fact that good may not always be done to me. It does not give up; it is committed to love through every trial and test.

The loving relationships our Savior focuses on are those within the church. “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” (Although often used for weddings, 1 Corinthians 13 is really also about the type of love all Christians should have for each other, married or not.)

Why would love be so important that Jesus would talk about it not long before he was going to die? Humble, self-giving, unselfish love for one another was the way that those 11 men would show that they were Jesus' disciples. It was the way people would recognize that they were believers in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, God's only Son, our only Savior.

The same is true today for us. Our congregation is a testimony to the world that we are the disciples of Jesus. When we love each other as Christ loved us, we bring glory to our Savior. It sounds hard, doesn't it? It sounds like a lot of work. It sounds like something that would be hard to focus on and easily lose your way. It sounds like something that the sinful nature in all of us would fight and something too many in the world around us would consider foolishness – self-sacrifice and denying oneself for the good of others.

Do we always love just like Jesus loved? Sadly, no. But Jesus doesn't place this commandment of love on us to frustrate us or drive us to despair. What Jesus does is show us how to lovingly respond to him who loved us so much that he gave of himself for us. We love because we are forgiven and free and willing to love as disciples of Christ, not because we are obligated to love or else.

We live in the light of the gospel, looking for opportunities to do good for one another. Do not let these words condemn you when you recognize that you are not as eager to do good for one another as you should. Instead, let them motivate you. Consider the one who speaks the words. It is he who has taken away the fear of death and shown you that you are valuable and precious to him and that is why he died to save you. It is he who tells you that every person sitting here with you today is also a valuable soul that he loves and has died for as well, enduring the punishment for everyone's sin.

Love *is* hard and we will never be able to love perfectly. Our sinful attitudes may convince us it isn't worth the time or the effort. Sinful caution may stop us dead in our tracks before we even say hi to that person we have seen so many times in church but have never spoken to. But Christ has forgiven you, his disciples and that message of God's forgiveness is all you need to equip and motivate you to love one another. So love one another with confidence and courage, knowing that Christ your Savior is backing you up every time.

**Conclusion** – It is impossible to be aware 24 hours a day of who may or may not be watching us and thinking about the kind of life we are living. But we pray today that God the Holy Spirit would be working in us constantly, by the power of God's Word, so that people recognize us as disciples of Jesus. Some people might recognize it and think terrible things about us, that we claim to be better than everyone else or that we are narrow minded or that we don't live in the real world. Others may recognize that we are disciples of Jesus and long for the type of love and commitment that we as Christians have toward each other.

We cannot control the way people react to us, but we can judge ourselves with God's word. We can turn to God and find forgiveness in Christ for our failure to live as his disciples. And we can be motivated by Christ's love to reach out beyond the walls of our own lives so that God may use us to be a blessing to someone else. Amen.