

**Jesus Changes Everything**  
**Jesus Changed Relationships with Others (John 13:31-35)**

**Melissa Hatfield, Preacher**

**First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, MO**

**January 29, 2023**

**WATCH/LISTEN:** [www.fbcjc.org/sermon/jesus-changed-relationships-with-others/](http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/jesus-changed-relationships-with-others/)

Reality television has been an incredibly popular genre in the entertainment business since the early 1990s. Some of us remember the debut of “The Real World” on MTV. Reality tv is a genre of programming that features “unscripted” real-life situations, often starring unfamiliar people rather than professional actors. It took off in the early 2000s with the success of the series Survivor, American Idol, the Bachelor, and Big Brother, all of which became global franchises. Reality tv shows tend to be peppered with “confessional” moments, where cast members reflect secretly on the events or the other people on the show, drawing the audience in on their game. There are often competitions and secret alliances and tons of deceit and backstabbing, with the sole purpose of coming out the winner in the end.

I have many dear friends who love reality TV. Who get together to watch these shows. Perhaps, you too, are a fan and have watched all 432 seasons of Survivor.

Reality TV is not my thing. There is far more drama in the real world already for me. Watching people lie, betray, exclude, and use people and relationships to acquire fame, riches, or privilege seems a little too real for me. It is our reality without the TV. We encounter people every day who show up in these ways with others. And, if we are honest, we struggle ourselves with the temptation to do the same.

Last weekend, I took my niece to St. Louis for lunch and to see the production of Les Misérables, my favorite musical. After lunch and after the show, we ran into insane traffic. People impatient, cutting in front of people, riding our bumper. I went on a little rant in the car with my niece about how people are so inconsiderate these days and only think of themselves and what they want, when they want it.

The next morning, I was driving to church and got behind what we call a “Sunday Driver.” They were driving about 10 MPH under the speed limit, and I was trapped until we hit the highway. As soon as I got the open lane, I sped past them, looking to my right as I passed. And there behind the wheel was a petite, precious older lady, both hands on the wheel, on her way to probably worship the Lord or rock babies in the church nursery as she’s done faithfully for 53 years. Or maybe she was on her way to the casino at Booneville. I don’t really know, but I do

know the Spirit convicted me in that moment of my rant on selfishness less than 24 hours earlier.

It is human nature to center ourselves. We fight this desire on even our best days. But when fear is added to the mix, self-centeredness and self-preservation intensifies. And there is no shortage of fear these days.

In recent years, we've seen an epidemic of what is known as cancel culture. Cancel culture is when people take away support for an individual because of something they've said or done that's considered unacceptable to them. Often, these are public figures, but every day people have been victims of cancel culture as well. Some see participating in cancel culture as the most effective way to hold people to account, especially if no other lawful way appears to be working. Others see it is more as a "mob mentality" that is out of control.

But this type of public shaming of deemed moral transgressors is not new for us. As author James Keane writes, "From the Salem witch trials of the 1690s ... to the Japanese American internment camps of the Second World War to the McCarthy anticommunist crusades of the early 1950s to the Hollywood blacklists of the same decade, we have a long and sordid history of deciding who's not getting with the program—and aggressively trying to drive them out into the desert. Usually, we applaud. Sometimes we apologize later."<sup>i</sup>

Relationships seem especially fragile to me these days. Maybe they do for you as well. We worry about being canceled, perhaps not as much from the larger society as much as friends, family, or our faith community, because we see things differently and don't know how to talk about it. You're either with us or against us seems to be the motto of the day. We experience relationships where people lie, betray, exclude, or abuse to get their way. Sometimes we are those people.

Jesus understands the fragility of relationships. Jesus's conversation with the disciples in today's scripture passage is situated between two significant, relationship events. In verse 31 at the beginning of today's text, we read "When he had gone out ... (John 13:31)" The reference is to Judas, one of the twelve disciples, who has just left the meal after Jesus reveals he knows of Judas's plan to betray him and tells him to do what he is going to do.

And immediately after today's text, Jesus calls out Peter's future betrayal, where Peter, one of Jesus's closest friends, will deny three times every knowing or following Jesus.

In the space between two betrayals from his closest companions that he is fully aware of, Jesus teaches us a new way of being in relationship together.

Jesus knew what was ahead for the disciples. The passion of Christ – his arrest, his suffering, his death – had begun. The disciples would be afraid and confused. Jesus used these final moments with his friends to prepare and encourage them, to instruct them on the community they were to be. He washed feet. He broke bread. He forgave betrayals. He speaks tenderly and compassionately to them, saying, “Little children ....”

In all the chaos, in what appears by human understanding to be defeat, in what looks like anything but glory and victory, when it feels like all is lost and fear is rising within you, remember this, little children: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:34-35

No more parables or confusion, just a simple commandment: “Little children, love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples.”<sup>ii</sup>

If the disciples can love one another during the suffering and unknown to come, Jesus says they will have proven themselves faithful to him. If the disciples can love each other in the shadow of the cross, they will have proven that they understood what Jesus taught them. If they can be patient with one another in the confusing and frightening times when Jesus is where they cannot be, they will bear witness to the difference Jesus has made in their lives.

There were lots of things Jesus could have said in these moments about what is most important. We might have expected him to shame Judas or Peter. We might expect a speech calling out their betrayals, warning us of the consequences of their choices, and making them an example. We might expect a list of the rules to follow and beliefs to protect when Jesus left them in charge.

Instead, chapter 13 begins with these words, “Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from the world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” John 13:1 Instead of shame, we get Jesus wrapping a towel around his waist and washing his disciples dirty, dusty feet. Instead of feeding fear, Jesus feeds them bread. Instead of a list of rules, we receive one new command: “love one another as I have loved you.”

In verse 15, Jesus tells them, “I have set the example, and you should do for each other exactly what I have done for you.” *Love as I have loved ...* love that embodies the mundane acts of washing the dirty feet of those who will walk away from you. *Love as I have loved ...* love that lays down its life for another. *Love as I have loved ...* from the mundane to death itself and everything in between. “Having Jesus as a model undoes all the limits. Whatever love might mean in a given moment; it asks for everything.”<sup>iii</sup>

Jesus is preparing his disciples for the mission to the world on which he will send them with his most important charge, remember you are loved and embody my love.

And they did.

In the early Church, the believers' love for one another, and for others, was so authentic and obvious that even those outside the Church took notice and were amazed by the loving-kindness of first and second-century Christians.

Christianity was spreading in those early years by the appeal of its community to the world around them. Tertullian, a pastor in the early years of the third century in northern Africa less than 200 years after Christ, remarked that non-Christians would look at Christians and say, "Look ... how they love one another ... and how they are ready to die for each other." It was not Christian worship that attracted outsiders; it was Christians who attracted them.<sup>iv</sup>

In 1966, Peter Scholtes, published the hymn, "They'll know we are Christians by our Love." (also, known as "We are One in the Spirit.") It's said that Scholtes took inspiration for the chorus' lyric from verses 34 and 35 of John 13, as well as an expression that tradition holds was frequently used by those outside the Church body, in speaking about Christians of the early Church. That expression—which has been repeated for centuries—is: **"Behold, how they love one another."**

That type of love is so rarely seen, it would seem strange. Their love was so clearly demonstrated in actions, that the sincerity of their heart was undeniable. Further, as outsiders considered the expressions of love shown by these Christians, they consequently had to consider the source of that love—who is Jesus Christ."<sup>v</sup>

Jesus changed their relationships with others, and it was undeniable to the world around them, a world used to people lying, betraying, excluding, and abusing others to get their way. Love united diverse Christ followers in a Greco-Roman world divided by class, ethnicity, and gender. The churches Paul planted turned upside down those divisions as they stayed true to the way of Jesus. All that previously had served to separate people was now gone because of Jesus. Neither Jew nor Greek; Male nor Female; Slave nor free. All are one in Christ. The visible unity of the church that cuts across the barriers of ethnicity, class, and gender witnesses to the world that a new King and new kingdom have come, and those who professed Christ pledged their sole allegiance to that King and kingdom.

Could the same be said today of the church in America? Do people look from the outside and say, "behold, how they love one another?" Do people see us holding our diversity and differences in love, humility, and mutual submission, or do they simply see division? Do they see us washing feet and sharing the table with those we may have nothing else in common with

other than our deep love and affection for Jesus? Do they see our allegiance to God's kingdom above all other kingdoms, or are they confused by our words and actions about where our allegiance lies?

Jesus's new commandment may be simple in words, but it is far from simple to live. As one modern New Testament scholar observed, however, "This new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, and it is profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice."<sup>vi</sup>

This level of sacrificial love can only be sourced from our understanding and acceptance of Jesus's sacrificial love for us. When we allow the love of Christ to take deep root in us, so that it flourishes in all that we do and say to one another, we make Christ known. From the mundane of washing feet, to the laying down of our agendas, our preferences, our fears, our very lives, we love not to please God. Although it does. We love not to earn God's love. We already have it. We love because he first loved us. We love because the Spirit of God is at work in us and among us. We love because to live in Jesus is to love and to love is to live in Jesus.

Jesus speaks tenderly to us today, too. Little children ... "love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/03/18/jesus-cancel-culture-242588>

<sup>ii</sup> Bartlett, D and Brown Taylor, B. *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, 472.

<sup>iii</sup> Donelson, Lewis. *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, 473.

<sup>iv</sup> Packiam, G. *The Resilient Pastor*, 155.

<sup>v</sup> <http://toliveischrist.com/love-one-another/>

<sup>vi</sup> Bartlett, D and Brown Taylor, B. *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, 471.