

April 17, 2016

“The Last Lesson”

John 13:31-38

In this new series, this is the second message. We are looking at the Biblical message through a specific lens. We saw last week that the word Christian was not used by the early church to describe itself. In fact the word Christian is used only 3 times in the whole of the New Testament. And each time it is used, it is used as someone else's word to describe the Jesus Movement. In Acts chapter 11 it is almost a throw away comment, although Luke never throws away historical observations. He records in Acts 11 that followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch. It was in Antioch that the first big breakthrough occurred with the Gentiles. A whole church emerged in Antioch, made up for the most part of Gentile converts. People totally lacking in a Jewish, Biblical...meaning Old Testament...background. They were called Christians by the balance of that city, and its leaders. It is a nonbelievers endeavour to describe the people making up this new assembly of believers under the ministry of Barnabas and Saul whom we know as the apostle Paul.

Here is the real problem with the word Christian. Because it was not the word the followers of Jesus used to describe themselves, there is not one portion of the New Testament in which the word is clearly defined. Last week I used the Oxford Dictionary to illustrate the problem. The word Christian is used by church going people today to describe themselves. But the word also is used by other groups of people and governments to mean civilized. That's the second meaning given by the Oxford Dictionary. The 3rd meaning is decent. Decent people. I sarcastically said, good folks who have not killed anyone recently. Moral people without any reference to an absolute moral code like the 10 Commandments.

We saw that there is a word that the early church's people used to describe themselves. And it is a bit of a scary word. Our first reaction on hearing it is to say, not me. I don't measure up to the Peters, Paul's, the James's and Johns of the New Testament. This word is disciple. The disciples of Jesus. That term describes the 12...and one of them was a dud. It also is used to describe the 120 who gathered in the upper room on the Sunday night of the day Jesus rose from the dead. It is also used to describe the 3000 who were added to the church at Pentecost. And all of those who were scattered by the ensuing persecution of those who believe and follow Jesus.

The term disciple is defined in the New Testament. Rabbi's had disciples. You did not choose your rabbi, you were chosen by him. Jesus chose his disciples...from John to Judas, Peter to James. They left their former lives and livelihoods and they followed Jesus. Wherever He went. They ate what He ate. Learned what He taught. The chosen said yes or no when they were chosen. Yes set the lifestyle. Jesus set the curriculum. Chose the places they went to. He did the teaching. Disciples learned and followed instruction. In the New Testament a disciple follows Jesus. Period.

Which brings us to John chapter 13. This is the last real lesson that Jesus teaches the disciples. Jesus knows what is going to happen. This will be a night filled with betrayal, denial, desertion, and arrest. In short order Jesus will be held. He will go through a series of trials. HE spent the night incarcerated in the cistern at Caiphas' house. The Sanhedrin tries Him and takes Him to Pilate. Pilate tries to get out from under by sending Jesus to Herod...because the charges involve religion. Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate. The sentence will be death by crucifixion. Jesus is stripped, whipped, and

Calvary unfolds.

That is what is coming in the next 24 hours or less. Jesus is at the table with the 12. Then there is 11. Judas has gone out to play “let's make a deal.” Jesus takes the opportunity to teach. He tells them that where He is about to go, they cannot come. And before anyone can ask a question Jesus leads into this remarkable piece of teaching. “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

There is an old saying, “When preachers don't have anything to say, they talk about love.” On the contrary: Jesus said this was important. So important that in this moment of crisis, when the 12 are all going to be tempted to run and hide and disavow their relationship to Jesus, this was the one lesson HE wanted them to remember. Love one another. The bond between believers is real. And if it is real it is intense. And that is not an accident, it is very simply the will of the Lord, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. I wear this Jesuit cross. Why? Because the fact is in my earliest years as an ordained minister serving in The Presbyterian Church In Canada, by the leading of God, and for the Lord's purposes, I was led to minister to and be ministered unto by the late Fr. Defosse in Kapuskasing. He had led his people through the building of their local church structure. This cross was his personal gift to me on the occasion of the dedication of St. John's Presbyterian in Kap in 1975. The bond between us was real. And to honour the intensity of that relationship, given us by the Lord Jesus, I have worn it ever since. Lost it 3 times. Found it each time. It is precious because of what it represents. Jesus said to the 11, “Love one another.”

4.

And if we ask the question, what does Jesus really mean, He was specific by way of the answer, before we ever asked the question, before anyone sitting at the Table with Him asked the question. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." And it is true Jesus had loved them. He had called them. He had taught them. He had revealed Himself to them in so many ways...the Transfiguration, the miracles. He had touched the untouchables. Leper, cripples, the blind who begged for a living. He had given sight, hearing, healing, cleansing while they watched. He had taught them to minister, to serve as HE served, and to see marvelous results.

More importantly: (most importantly), HE brought them to Jerusalem. They feared what could happen here. They advised against this walking into the mouth of the lion. This love one another, is not a lesson about an idea, it is about action. "Love one another as I have loved you". It is a lifestyle defined by Calvary and the significance of Calvary. Forgiveness of sins. Entering the Kingdom of God. Heaven. New life. Eternal life. Jesus said, this is how you must love one another, see what I do for you, and do it for others. Do it with others. Love sacrificially. Love redemptively. Let your body be broken, your blood poured out, loving others and one another as I have loved you. No buts. No qualifications. Before Nike was anyone's dream, Jesus said, "Just do it."

You know what I believe. I am a classic fundamentalist. My endeavour is to take the Bible seriously as it is to be found. I have striven not to deviate from the path laid out by the classic creeds which are based on Biblical teaching. That's important. But notice this. I said this is a remarkable piece of teaching. And I say it again. Jesus did not say to them, hours before His arrest, the night

before His redemptive death, 3 days and a night before His resurrection. He did not say, “Boys, here is what you have to believe. Jesus always chose His words with care and meant what He said and said what He meant. He did not say, By this will all men know that you are my disciples...believe these things! He said love one another. Love one another as I have loved you...as you will see me loving you tomorrow when I hang between 2 criminals on that cross at Calvary. One will revile me. One will plead for eternal mercy. Love one another...as I will love both of them. I will die for both of them. And I will be raised up on the 3rd day.

Too often we have promoted our denominational distinctives, and our congregational distinctives instead of obeying the Lord's command to love one another in the way of the cross. Too often we have qualified the extent to which we should love to protect ourselves, our interests, or because we were careless and even afraid. Jesus said love one another to the extent that you have strength and breath. By this will people know you are mine, by the manner in which you love one another. They will see it, and they will find themselves saying, My God...My God. And they will mean it. Just as the centurion meant it, at the foot of the cross.

This last lesson of our Lord and Saviour is so profound, it is the first commandment we break because we fear the cost. If this commandment had been lived...there would be no ISIS in our time. There would have been no Soviet Union. Two World Wars would not have occurred. I am saying if we had loved as Jesus instructed us to the world would have been different in the 20th century and it would be different in the 21st. The attitude of the world to the disciples of Jesus would be different.

6.

The power of the church and her representatives including myself and you lies in nothing, except our willingness to put ourselves on the line in obedience to this word. “Love one another as I have loved you.” By this all men, all, will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus, we know this is hard teaching to follow, and easy teaching to minimize. Peter's response was, “Where are you going? Why can't I follow you now? I would lay down my life for You!

We too are tempted to want to object that there are more important things for us to do and the church to do...than this. Your word reminds us, you see things differently. Bend us and break us to your precious holy will. Teach us to remember to do this one thing...to love even unto Calvary. Amen