

**I Love My Church #1**  
**How Do You Love A Church??**  
**John 13:34-35**  
**10/8/17**

- **Play Bumper Video**
  
- There are different places, locations, buildings that we eventually *have* to visit in life. There's no way to get around it. We will visit these places at some point.
  - o And, I'm not talking about Disney World, that's a "want to" visit place. I'm talking about the places we need to go to just because of the course of life. School, for example. Who here has gone to school?
  - o Or the dentist's office. Please tell me everyone has been to the dentist's office!
  
- When you think of various necessary places they will typically invoke a variety of responses in us. Some responses are more happy-type responses and some are not so happy-type responses, right?
  - o I mean, we feel different about going to the mall compared to say going to the dentist. Let's take a look at a few. I'm going to put an image of a place up on the screen, and I want you to say the first word that comes to mind about how you or even people in general typically feel in regard to having to go to these locations. Give me one word. I'm going to write our words on this flip chart.
    - 1<sup>st</sup> image: DMV
    - 2<sup>nd</sup> image: Doctor's office
    - 3<sup>rd</sup> image: Grocery store / WalMart (If I'm going with the boys, my word would be torture! Sometimes – not always, but sometimes!)
    - 4<sup>th</sup> image: Hospital
  
- Those things don't get the most rave reviews, right? Some worse than others, but in all four of them you can see that we go to these places in most cases because we have to, not necessarily because we want to. The common response I have for all of this is just "Ugh!"
  - o And look at our list of words. No one said, "Love it!" did they? You'll occasionally hear someone say they love the grocery store if they are comparing it to a worse place. I mean, I would much rather go to WalMart than to the dentist! Or, we would rather go to the doctor for a routine check-up than to the hospital for a surgery.
  - o But if anyone ever says they love going to the DMV, we're going to assume they need help! Amen?
  
- Now, I wonder what people would say if we put up this picture. In case you don't recognize it, it's a picture of our church. What would people say about the church? What would people say about our church?

- Now, don't say anything out loud for this one, but let's think about it honestly. Do we think about church the same way we think about going to the DMV, the doctor's office, or the grocery store? Is this just a place that we feel we "have" to go to or is there more to it?
  - Think about people who aren't here with us today or maybe people who haven't been here for a long time or who haven't stepped into a church in a long time or ever. I'd be willing to guess that some of them would describe coming to church like we describe going to the DMV.
  - And, based on their experiences, maybe they wouldn't be far off from the truth.
  - In fact, let's hear from some random people who could be from here or anywhere about what they think about the church.
  - **Video**
- Is that what Jesus intended when He created the church? Is that the response that God intended people to have about the church. Was that His idea about this community of people? I believe the Bible tells us that *no*, that wasn't God's plan for the church. What did God intend?
    - After all, at the end of Acts 2, it talks about the first church that was formed and what all they did as a church. And, it says in verse 47, that the church enjoyed "the goodwill of all the people." Everybody looked at this newly formed church and were impressed by it. They had a positive response!
  - When people see our church, we want them to have goodwill in their hearts toward us. We want them to see that we are people of a peace that comes from Jesus and that we want to share that peace with others. We want people to know that real peace can only be found in Jesus.
    - And, we share that peace and live in that peace by the way we love. We've talked about the crazy love Jesus has for us and the crazy love that we should have for Jesus. I believe that God wants us to love the church – with a crazy love!
    - Not love that we see in the world sometimes or maybe have experienced in the past, but love the church as *He* intended it to be. That's what this series is going to be about—that we'd learn to be the community God intended us to be. That we might fall in love with the church! Not the building, the church isn't the building. This building could burn up in a fire or be destroyed by a tornado and the church would still be alive and well! Because the church is the people in it.
    - So then, we are going to talking a lot about how to crazy love each other as God's church.
  - This crazy love for the church and each other is found in John 13:34-35. Let's read that together.
    - In this verse, Jesus is giving a prelude of what he wants for the church to come. The church actually starts after Jesus has risen from the dead and ascends to heaven. Like I said, chapter 2 of the book of Acts describes how the church began.

- But, here we find Jesus meeting with His disciples, telling them how His followers should be known. He wanted to be very clear what he wanted the reputation and response to be of this community He is creating. He wanted it to be so clear, that he made it a command. Not a suggestion, not a law, an eternal, forever command.
  - The command: He wants the church to be people known for their love for one another.
- Church people are meant to love one another. It's not optional, not an elective and not a feeling. We are to love one another. But what does that mean? What does it mean to love one another? When we say we want to love the church as God intended, what do we mean by "love"?
    - We've talked about crazy love and what that looks like. Let's look at a couple of other examples. Because when we say "I love my church," what does Jesus intend for that to look like?
- Let me use an illustration...I want you to think about your favorite restaurant. Most of you know that Wil and I love Mexican food – actual, real Mexican food made by people from Mexico. When we were in the Midwest, we ate Mexican food at different restaurants four times. My favorite Mexican place is Real Hacienda in Anderson, IN.
    - But, one of my favorites here is Monahan's Clam Shack in Narragansett at the end of the sea wall. Do you know where I'm talking about? It's just this little place where you order outside. But, they have really great food for decent prices. I love their coconut shrimp or their southern spicy shrimp. Wil likes their Caribbean fish sandwich. Josiah likes their fries.
    - The staff have always been so sweet and friendly. Now, they could use more parking, but overall, the location is fantastic. You get to eat right by the water. I love going to Monahan's right when they open at 11a when they aren't busy yet. I'm always disappointed when they close for the season because I love that restaurant.
- Now, let's compare that with another love. We just had Josiah's birthday party yesterday. He's going to turn 8 this week. When we moved here, he was six months, now he's 8! Crazy!
    - As much work as birthday parties are and as much as they can even cost sometimes, I love planning these parties for my boys. It's an opportunity to make it all about them. And, I try to do as much as what they want, within reason. I spend a few weeks getting everything together.
    - This year, Josiah wanted a swimming party at the YMCA. He helped pick out the invitations and decorations. He determined that he wanted an outdoor basketball hoop as his gift. He wanted a certain kind of cake. Of course, he wanted pizza to eat. Very few of the things he picked out are things I would have picked out, but it's his day.
    - And, every year, without fail, after his party, he always gives me a big hug and says, "Thank you for my party! It was awesome! I love you, Mommy!" My heart always

swells because it's all done as an expression of our great love for him. I love my sons.

- What does that have to do with how we love the church and how we love each other in the church? Well, does God want me to love the church like I love Real Hacienda or Monahan's or does He want me to love the church like I love my sons?
  - o See, with the restaurant, I experience something given to me, a place offering me something. The restaurant feeds me and gives me a service. If the experience itself was excellent, I could even rate it. I could give it a positive review on Yelp, and recommend it to others. If it was the opposite type of experience, I wouldn't return and I'd tell others to avoid it.
  - o Now, with my son I experience an important relationship. My son is someone I am intrinsically connected with. They are my heart walking around outside my body. My love for him isn't based on what I'm receiving or experiencing but based on who he is and what is involved in our relationship.
  - o Because I love him, I care for him, I play with him, I plan things for him, we go through life together. That journey might bring about some not so great experiences. I'm not always super pleased with their behavior.
  - o The other day, Stephen was so mad at me for taking away his favorite thing to do as a punishment for something that he did. Yet, when he's upset, he often wants to be held. So, still crying and fussing, he reached up for me. As he was in my lap calming down, I was hugging him and rubbing his back. He said, "I'm so upset with you." I said, "I'm upset with you, too, for not listening and that's why I took your favorite thing away. But, I still love you."
  - o We work through those upset or mad moments. And, I don't Yelp rate my son. I love him.
  
- Yet, how often have we treated the church like a restaurant that provides a service or a product when we should be treating the church like we do our deepest relationships which provide the greatest joys and love of our lives?
  - o The church was never meant to be like a restaurant; it's meant to be based on relationship – relationships that you don't rate or throw away when things get a bit tough or disagreeable in some way.
  - o This begins first and foremost in a relationship with Jesus, and through that we are connected to one another. God intended people to love the church with relationship love, not restaurant love.
  
- Jesus loves us and brought us into relationship with Himself. His death on the cross was an act of love for us. During the Crazy Love series, we looked in depth at John 3:16 which shares just how much God is in love with us - so much that He sent His son to die for us, that we might have real life. He intentionally loved us, sought us out and served us.
  - o But, Jesus didn't stop there. We aren't only brought into a relationship with Jesus but also into relationship with one another. Being in a relationship with Jesus means

being part of the church, part of His kingdom, part of the family of faith, the family of God.

- Many people treat the church like a restaurant. If the experience isn't just to their liking, they'll find somewhere else or not go at all. If someone does something that rubs them the wrong way, they don't reach out, they withdraw and even walk away completely.
  - o This is beyond unfortunate. This sets up expectations for the church that it was never intended to fulfill. And, we have to be honest here, this kind of love isn't relationships-focused; this is self-focused.
  - o This isn't loving as Jesus loved. That isn't crazy love. That's selfish love. It's loves as I see fit, as am comfortable with, and for my own gain. The church isn't supposed to be like that.
  - o We'll love the church when it is about relationships, not when it is like a restaurant. When it's about relationships, church is about connections and others. When it's like a restaurant, we have a "cater to me" mentality.
  
- Next, God intends for us to intentionally love the church. You will have a deep sense of love for the church when you actively and intentionally practice love for the church. The opposite is also true: When you don't intentionally love the church, then you will not experience a love for the church.
  - o We talked about crazy love being a choice. That's what intentionally loving the church is about. You choose to love the church - the people in the church - regardless of whether you like everything about what is going on. Unless there is something going on that is against Scripture, you must intentionally love the church and not rate it like you would a product or a service.
  - o When people ask us about our church, we should say, "I love my church!" We might not like everything about it or even like everything about the people in it. That's fine. But, we must intentionally, by choice, love each other. When we choose love, even when we don't always feel love, the real love will follow.
  
- Did you notice the question in the title of the sermon this morning? How do you love a church? We just answered that. It's based on how you view the church.
  - o See, you won't really love your church if you see it as an organization or a system or organized religion. You won't really love your church if your approach is about "what can the church do for me?" You won't really love the church if it's about how well the church caters to your preferences and ideas.
  - o You love your church when you see the church as people who you are connected to in relationships that are bound by the blood and love of Jesus Christ himself.
  
- So, what does it look like to intentionally love the church? What does it look like to be in community with one another as God intended it to be? Well, that's what the rest of this series is about! We're going to look at loving the church in a variety of areas. Let me give you an overview...

- First, we're going to look at how to love by connecting. Connecting means being in community. We are in fellowship and in relationship with one another. It's about that we know each other more than knowing people's names and where they sit on a Sunday morning.
  - o You know, I can't tell you how many times people have asked about folk when they've noticed that they haven't been coming to church. The conversation goes a little like this, "Pastor Angela, what happened to that couple that was coming. They usually sat on left side of the sanctuary. I think her name was Sue or some name that starts with an "S," I think. I used to say hi to her during greeting time."
  - o We think we love one another when we stand alongside one another. But, love is more than knowing a couple of basics like their name and seat preference. Being connected with one another is ensuring no one stands alone. Because, let me tell you, the loneliest place in the world is when you are surrounded by people, but no one is there with you, connected with you.
  
- How do we do that? Well, we have to spend time together. It has to move beyond this time we spend on Sunday morning during service and move to more time. We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. Building friendships equals spending time together.
  - o So, next Sunday...let me just ask a question... How many of you plan to eat lunch after church on Sunday? Great! I would encourage you to come prepared to spend some time together. Could you plan to each lunch with some people from church in order to build relationships?
  
- In your bulletin, there is an insert that we are asking everyone to fill out. If you don't have one, raise your hand and a WOW Team member will get one for you. We want you to connect with some folks over lunch. There are three ways you can opt to do this.
  - o Next Sunday, for those who have been coming to our church over the last few months, so you're newer here, we are having a Pastor's Lunch. This is an opportunity to get to know people in the church a little better and to hear more about what we believe God's vision is for our church. If this is you, you have probably received a personal invitation about this in mail from me along with tickets. If you plan to be there, you can indicate that on your insert. That's how you are going to connect next Sunday.
  - o If you are a regular here, we want you to connect in a different way. There is a space that you can indicate if you would like to go out to eat lunch with a group of people after next week's service to connect in community. After we see who all wants to do that, we will make groups for next week and the only thing you have to do is chose a restaurant and go out to eat together. Unfortunately, Monahan's is closed or I would suggest there!
  - o Finally, there is another option – if there might be people who can't afford to go out to eat. People with kids, it can get expensive to go out to eat! But, maybe you would like to get together in someone's house for a potluck, you can indicate that and if you are willing to open up your home for people to come, indicate that as well and we'll contact you about this.

- We're going to see how this works! I just kind of had the idea and threw it together! And it's kind of a surprise for everyone! Hopefully, you all will sign up and there will be enough people to connect with others in the various ways. It's just for one Sunday and it's just a way to start building community. We don't want you to hang out with the same group of people you always hang out with. Get to know others beyond their name and where they sit on Sunday!
- Through this series, we're also going to look at how to love by giving. Yes, we talked a little about giving last week and we are going to talk about it again. But, probably not in the way you'd expect. In fact, we won't talk at all about tithing or percentages. We won't try any ill-planned guilt trips to get you to give more. Guilt is a terrible, short-lived motivator. I'm not about doing that anyway. We'll simply talk about giving as an indicator of love.
- And, finally, we're going to look at how to love by sharing. The love that Jesus gives to us and that we can have for one another isn't to be hoarded within the walls of the church. The love that we are to have for one another is also meant to show our community what the love of Jesus looks like.
  - I believe our world is dying, literally dying and even killing others (as witnessed last Sunday in Vegas) because people do not know the love of Jesus that we have! If we aren't sharing the love of God with our words and deeds, then we aren't truly loving. We'll talk about this as well.
  - All of this is going to culminate with our Back to Church / Harvest Dinner Sunday that, as we said, is going to happen on Sunday, November 5<sup>th</sup>. From now until then, we have the opportunity and a headstart to love by sharing and inviting people to come to that Sunday with us and see how we do community together and why that's important to their lives as well. On Back to Church Sunday, we are going to start another sermon series called "I Love Sundays!" to see how Sundays have changed the world and how Sundays can change your life.
- But, we can't love Sundays until we love the church. So, I invite you to stick with us for the next few weeks as we look at various ways that we can intentionally love the church that Jesus designed and built for us.
  - If you are with us today and don't have a relationship with Jesus or you're just checking this whole church thing out, I invite you to stick around as well. Some of you have had some negative experiences with church in the past, and for that I am truly sorry. I want you to know that's not what God intended. Why not join us for a few weeks to learn what the church is supposed to be like.
  - We won't get it perfect. But, church, are we willing to try? Are we willing to try so that people will look at our church, at us, and respond with positive thoughts and with goodwill?
  - This is going to be an exciting journey—and I'm excited we're able to go through this together because I love you. I love my church!