

## **“What the World Needs Now”**

**John 13:31-35**

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If you knew today would be the last day you would spend with your family and dearest friends, what would you say to them? This was the question facing Jesus as he gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room the night before his crucifixion.

Soon after Jesus washed the disciples' feet, Judas left the room to betray Jesus by telling the authorities where he was. This meant Jesus' arrest was imminent, and his time with the disciples was coming to an end, at least the way they had known it during his public ministry.

There was only time for a few parting words and a prayer before the authorities would come looking for Jesus. Every word had to be chosen carefully.

“Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews, so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’

I give you a new commandment, that **you love one another**. Just as I have loved you, you should also **love one another**. By this, everyone will know you are my disciples, if you **love one another**.”

Three times in two verses, Jesus instructed the disciples to love each other after he was gone. Repetition communicates importance and urgency. Ask any parent.

**Why was Jesus adamant that his disciples love each other after he returned to his Father?** Jesus had no plan B for continuing the work they had begun. *He knew the only way this diverse group of disciples from all walks of life would stay together was to have their relationship rooted and grounded in love.* The stresses and strains of life would pull them apart if they did not love each other. Only love would keep them focused upon their mission and faithful to their calling.

A father who was terminally ill sent for his four children. The end was in sight, and he knew this could be their last time together.

After all of them arrived, the father asked a couple of them to go to the yard and gather five sticks. He asked the other two to go to the kitchen and get him a piece of string.

When they returned, he handed one of the sticks to a son and instructed him to break it. He did so with very little effort.

He then took the other four sticks and wrapped the string around them. He handed the bundle to another child and asked him to break it. As hard as he tried, he could not do it.

“I am not going to be with you much longer,” he told them. “My dying wish is that you stay close to each other and continue the good work that your mom and I began. Love each other at all times, good or bad. If you do, nothing will break you. Like this bundle of sticks as opposed to the single stick, you will withstand whatever comes your way.”

I get the feeling Jesus was sending the same message to his disciples. Love is the glue which holds people together when everything around them is trying to pull them apart, because love is more powerful than disagreements, disappointments, shattered dreams and broken hearts.

*Jesus knew their love for one another would get people's attention and be used by God to transform people.* It would become their most recognizable trait.

People always notice when someone responds to disappointment and pain with grace and mercy. It is so counter-culture.

The world expects people who have been hurt to lash out with hateful words. People are not surprised when someone who has been wronged retaliates by seeking revenge. This is human nature, and quite frankly, it comes rather easily.

What shocks the world, however, is a different reaction, one which seeks to keep a bad situation from getting worse and focuses upon healing wounds, not inflicting more. This kind of restraint doesn't go unnoticed.

It will soon be seven years since a lone gunman by the name of Charles Carl Roberts IV stepped into a one-room Amish school in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and opened fire. He killed five little girls and injured five more.

As you would expect, the attention of the entire country was focused upon this tragedy at the Nickel Mines School and these quiet, humble folk in Bart Township of Lancaster County. These good-hearted people taught us a lot that week about the radical nature of Christian love.

On the evening of the shooting, family members of the slain children visited Carl Roberts' parents to offer their condolences and to let them know they held no grudge against

them. As a matter of fact, they even told the shooter's parents they had forgiven their son for what he did.

People are still writing six and one-half years later about the gracious response of the Amish to this disaster. Again, I am not surprised. This kind of response captures people's attention.

Jesus knew the disciples would not only disappoint each other but also be maligned and abused by the very people they were trying to help. Their neighbors would expect them to respond out of anger and disgust. No amount of rage would be condemned.

If they refused to do this, however, but instead would seek ways to help both the victims and the perpetrators to heal, then God could use their example to inspire others to do the same. Jesus staked his life upon it, and he wanted his disciples to do the same.

"Love one another as I have loved you," he said. "By this, everyone will know you are my disciples."

How interesting this is. Jesus did not say their neighbors would know they were his disciples by what they believed, how often they went to the synagogue, how well they prayed or how many scriptures they could quote, not that any of these is bad. The determining factor would be how they treated each other, especially when they had been hurt. It still is.

*Jesus wanted them to love one another because he knew this would bring out the best in them.* I am convinced the authorities who crucified Jesus thought their worst behavior would also bring out his worst, just as it had done for so many others. They were dumbfounded when it did not, but instead brought out his best behavior.

"Surely, this man was the Son of God!" the centurion at the foot of the cross exclaimed. Never had he seen anyone die with the courage and compassion of Jesus.

Living and loving the way Jesus modeled will get a similar reaction from the people who are observing us. This is because living by this ethic of love will bring out our best.

Under no circumstances will we speak or act out before we think, thereby making a bad situation worse. We will not be disrespectful or condemn others with no hope for redemption. While we will always expect the best from others, we will not give up on them when they fail to live up to their potential.

In addition, we will refuse to let the monster controlling those who hurt us seize control of us, too. Instead, we will become wounded healers who condemn evil while seeking to restore evil doers.

I know this is not easy, and Jesus never said it would be. The kind of love he taught and modeled always involves the highest level of sacrifice. The less you are willing to risk and give, the less impact you will have upon those around you. It's that simple.

**Where did you see this kind of love in action last week?** Who was at their best when others were at their worst? Who responded to shattered dreams and a broken heart with courage and compassion? Did you sense the presence of Christ in their life? Did it inspire you to be a better person?

"They will know you are my disciples by your love," Jesus told his disciples. **Who recognized you were one of Jesus' disciples last week?** Who did you inspire by the way you dealt with disappointment or adversity?

**Who needs you to model this kind of love in the week ahead?** Who looks to you to teach them how to respond to those who hurt them? Based upon what they hear you say and see you do, what are you teaching them?

With God's help, what could you do this week to keep your family or circle of friends from spinning out of control and coming apart? How could you take the lead and change the atmosphere and discussion at home, at school or at work? How could you help people to see what is at stake?

By God's grace, what could you do this week which would get people's attention and compel them to reconsider what they are saying and doing? How could God use you to build bridges of understanding and goodwill to replace walls of suspicion and hate?

What is one thing you need to work on in the days ahead which would let others know you are Jesus' disciple? Will you do it?

Years ago, Jackie DeShannon popularized a song written by Hal David titled, "What the World Needs Now." I used to belt out the lyrics as a teenager while washing cars at my brother's service station.

"What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing there's just too little of. What the world needs now is love, sweet love; no, not just for some but everyone. Lord, we don't need another mountain. There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb. There are oceans and rivers enough to cross, enough to last until the end of time. What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing there's just too little of."

I'm not sure what kind of love Hal David or Jackie DeShannon had in mind, but I have some understanding of the kind of love Jesus was referring to in this passage. It is an honest,

hopeful, helpful, healing, forgiving, encouraging, redeeming, transforming love. It really is the kind of love the world needs now.

**Will you let God use you this week to meet this crucial need?**