



MINISTER  
DAN YEAZEL, PREACHING  
KIM JOHNSON

---

---

*Sixth Sunday after Easter*  
*April 27, 2008*

*John 14:15-21*

---

### **To Be Disciples**

Intro: Our New Testament lesson is from John. It is part of what is called the Farewell Discourse of Jesus. At this point Jesus has told Peter that Peter will betray him three times, he has talked about his father's mansion having many rooms and Jesus has washed the disciples' feet. He knows that his time on earth is short and he wants to explain how they will not be alone once he is gone. Let us listen for God's word as it comes to us through John's words.

Although we are in the season after Easter, our text today invites us back to the Upper Room, back to listen again as Jesus shares with his disciples during the Last Supper. What we hear are words of comfort and instruction, Jesus is equipping the disciples to live and carry on even when he is no longer physically present. The focus is love, the kind of love that sustains and nourishes and lasts. The kind of love which the world cannot see, except through the eyes of faith. Jesus speaks of love rooted in the grace and faithfulness of God. This is the kind of love that we, as followers of Christ, are called to share in God's world.

As Jesus speaks of love it is not primarily emotional love, or affectionate love, or intellectual love. Rather it is love that is there because we have made a commitment to God. It is love that acknowledges, at the deepest level, that a community of faith cannot thrive and grow without a sense of mutual love that under girds everything. The love with which we are called is based on our commitment to God's will. We are supposed to do this, "loving like Jesus" means unconditional love that is rooted in grace, it is not offering love only after it is earned through achievement or obedience.

A few years ago, I had the chance to hear Roger Nishioka, a dynamic and creative youth specialist within our denomination. He was the keynote speaker at Synod School. Each day with amazing humor and warmth, Roger told these terrific stories and he wove a web of wisdom around us. His main focus was how churches can connect with young people today. He spoke of how the church can help grow disciples and the importance of both nurturing our young people in faith but also the great importance of listening to young people. As he described how children mature in faith, he talked about two different ways children can experience and understand love. One way is conditional love and the other is unconditional love. He is not the first to describe these ways of loving but it made a lasting impact on me. And I wonder if these descriptions don't speak, at least in part, to our experiences growing up, and even to our sense of how God might love us.

Conditional love suggests that a parent's love of a child is dependent upon what he or she does, upon what he or she achieves. Conditional love subtly, or not so subtly, suggests that SAT scores, AP courses, sports awards, and musical awards are what make a child "special." This kind of love sends signals that getting into the best schools will insure one's worth for life, using standards of money and power. As adults, do we

carry any sense of those conditions? Do we ever imagine that God's love for us might carry "requirements"?

There is of course, an alternative to conditional love. It is unconditional love -love that cherishes a child for who she or he is, not for what is achieved. No matter what. We see a glimpse of that kind of relationship in "Mama do you love me?" Roger Nishioka has worked with teenagers from across the country. Often he will ask them to participate in an exercise. He asks them to think of the most horrible, destructive, "bad" thing they could do -something that they have been taught is wrong. Then he asks them to list five people who will still "love" them, even when the young people confess what they have done. You know what was hard to hear? Many of the young people who participate in this exercise cannot think of a single name. As a community of faith, is our name on the list of our young people? Would someone wondering in to worship for the first time realize that CPC is a place where everyone is welcome - no matter what?

In our text today, we have, in a nutshell, Jesus' own definition of what it means to be his disciple: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." That must be important, because he repeats it just a moment later: "They who have my commandments and keep them are those

who love me. And he clarifies what he means by stating the one great commandment we are to keep, and that is to love one another, as God in Christ has loved us. Our Reformed Faith is built upon the certainty that "salvation" comes to us by grace, and not by works. God loves us not for what we do but for who we are. And there is a tension in this commandment to love. Can we make ourselves "love"? If we could just do that, there would be no need for any other commandments, or laws, or rules. But therein, of course, lies the problem. We'd like to; we try to, but that one commandment is a tall order. A lot of people give up trying. A lot more of us, I think, become thoroughly frustrated with the whole thing, and we keep asking the question, "How?!" How, given the realities of our own lives, and the realities of the people we have to live and work with, how do we find it possible to live out even this one commandment? Even more difficult, given all the people who are different from us, and who do not value the same things we do, how do we obey this one commandment? In this world that we live in, how can anyone be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ? It's a very good question. And it's what the rest of this passage from John 14 is about. Not only does Jesus say that if we love him, we will keep his commandments and love one another ..... he also says, that he will pray for God to send us the Spirit of

Truth, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. And it is the Spirit who gives us power to be disciples. That's the true answer. We cannot do it on our own. It is humanly impossible. At times, we may sense that we come close; and for a long time we may believe if we work at it hard enough, we will achieve discipleship on our own. We live in northern MN, we hate to admit that we need help, even from God. But if we are really serious about making discipleship a part of our lives, it is the Holy Spirit that we must ask for. And the Spirit will indeed come to us with guidance, with truth, with gifts and with the power to love like Jesus asks.

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to be disciples. The Spirit gives us the will and gives us the way. In a few weeks, we'll come to the feast of Pentecost and celebrate anew the coming of the Holy Spirit to the church. But we need not wait until then to begin looking around us at the people we encounter, seeing in them our family, our beloved relatives in God. Through the example of Jesus, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will leave no one orphaned or unloved. Amen.