



John 15:9-17

“Love Like Jesus”

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Let's begin where Jesus begins: Love one another. In this passage, Jesus goes beyond the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule says what? . . . That's right . . . Matthew 7:12 *So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

Typical of Jesus, He asks us to look deeper into the human heart, to look deeper into the heart of God. He tells us it's not enough to fulfill the Golden Rule by treating others as we would like them to treat us. We are not simply to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

It's not enough to treat others as we want them to treat us because we're not always sure how we want people to treat us. We're not always sure we're lovable. Human love is always conditional and selective. We may love someone because he or she acts lovable toward us. But then we withdraw our love when we feel wronged, dismissed, misunderstood or cheated. And, suddenly, love is replaced by a whole lot of something else...something less.

We love people who are like us, who share our background, our lifestyle, our values; who are talented and gifted and dress like we like them to dress. Jesus' love, on the other hand is different. It is sacrificial. Jesus is asking us to love others as He loves others. Wow! Sometimes that's not easy! But, then again, sometimes it is...

It wasn't a big deal for Winnipeg bus driver, Kris Doubledee, when he saw a man walking barefoot downtown, stopped his bus, got out, gave the man his shoes, got back on the bus without comment and drove as usual. A passenger blogged about it at CommunityNewsCommons—and soon the Canadian and international media outlets picked up the story and identified Doubledee as the driver. “It was automatic,” he later explained to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. “You know, it was something I could do. It looked like he needed the shoes more than I did. Anybody would do the same thing.”

We say, that's the sort of thing Jesus would do. Yes, and that is the sort of thing a follower of Jesus would do. But I wonder...could we love others the way Jesus loves them?

We sometimes get to see this kind of love sometimes in those who care for others. There was a beautiful story in *Reader's Digest* a while ago. It was written by a woman in Rhode Island. She wrote that only three times in her whole life did she see her father cry.

The first time she saw him cry was when she was seven. His mother, her grandmother had died. The second time she saw him cry was at the airport when his son, her brother departed for Vietnam. The third time she saw her father cry was when he was in his 80s. Her mother, in late-stage Alzheimer's, resided in a memory care facility. Her father visited her mother, his much-beloved wife, daily for ten years except for three months when he broke his foot and both the cast and the brace made it impossible for him to get there.

After his foot healed, he returned to the care facility. It seemed like such a long time since he had seen his wife. He said, "I thought Mother forgot me, but when she saw me, she recognized me, smiled and said, 'I love you.'" Then, his daughter said, her father sobbed.

Some of us understand those tears. We know a little bit of what it means to love as Jesus' loved. We love those closest to us like that. The question is, can we enlarge that circle of love? This is what Jesus is asking us to do.

And it can be hard to do. Our own shortcomings can get in our way. In short, we're afraid. Fear might have to do with a lot of things. Fear might have to do with judgment. It might have to do with the sense that we don't measure up. We're not good enough. We're not loved. That place deep inside us asks, "If you really knew me, would you still love me?"

And when we fear this way, we become evasive and protected, defensive and even aggressive. We want to settle scores. We're easily threatened. We're open prey to envy and pride and greed. We try to define ourselves by what we have or what we know or what others think about us. We spend inordinate amounts of time trying to manipulate people's perception of us. But here's the thing: The more you realize how high and deep and wide is the love Jesus has for us, the less we fear. Love and fear cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Love always wins.

Might it be helpful for us to remember the circle to whom Jesus is talking when He gives this new commandment? He's talking to His transparently imperfect first-century disciples—those men and women who loved imperfectly. Jesus gave them and now this side of the Emmaus Road, He gives it to us. **We are to "love each other as He has loved us."**

This command is linked to the first, which is to remain in God's love. When we remain in God's love, God's love can flow through us (like the water flowing through our fountain by the church's front doors) and give us the power to love others.

Let me say it again: We love because Jesus first loved us. We simply don't have the power to love as Jesus loved us unless we invite and allow His spirit to work in us and through us. Then and only then can we fulfill His command to love others as He has loved us. Abide in God's love. Love others the way Jesus loves us. This is what the cross is all about. We see His love poured out on the cross. The Golden Rule, as wonderful as it is, is insufficient for this task. We are not simply to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. We are to do unto them as Jesus has done unto us.