

Unsafe Love
April 28, 2013

John 13:31-35

31 When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. 33 "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

If you were here for our Maundy Thursday Service you heard me read the scripture from John 13: 1 thru 17. It was the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples during the meal we have come to know as the last supper. Today's scripture comes just a few verses later in the same chapter. Yes, we are still in the upper room, still having that last supper. Jesus is trying to tell the disciples that he is going to be killed. And he is trying to give them (for lack of a better word) instructions for how to continue on after he is gone. Judas has just left the room. He has gone to betray Jesus. John spends the next four chapters of this gospel covering Jesus' instructions to the disciples. We aren't going to try to cover all four chapters this morning. If I did, we might set a new record for the longest sermon. Let's just concentrate on the verses in today's scripture text. Verse 33 reads, **"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.** Once again, they are confused. Later in the chapter they are asking, where are you going? Why can't we come too? Why can't we follow you? They truly had no clue about what was going to happen. You may be asking the question, why are we back in this part of John. Today is the fifth Sunday of Easter. Christ has been crucified, buried and has risen from the dead. So why here? Good question.

Maybe we need some of those same instructions that the disciples needed. Aren't we supposed to be spreading the good news? Let's look at a couple of instructions. Let's start at the first part of verse 34: **A new command I give you: Love one another.** Is this really a new command? The Torah was written several thousand years before Jesus Christ was born. We know Christ was very familiar with the Torah. In Leviticus 19:18 (our Old Testament, the Jewish Torah) we read, **Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.** So the concept to love everyone was not new. As a matter of fact, in Matthew 22: 39-40 we read, **"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."** So why is Jesus saying a **new command I give you**. It's the second half of the verse that is new. The second half of verse 34 reads: **As I have loved you, so you must love one another.** There is the new part, **As I have loved you, so you must love one another.** Not just love one another, but love them just as He loved us. Our message today isn't just about how Jesus was trying to prepare the eleven disciples about carrying on his ministry after he was gone, but it is to us today. It is a message to us about carrying on His ministry today. **As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

Can we define love? It's really tough; think about it for a minute. What is love? Love is so big, so mysterious that you can't really capture it in words, but when you see it, you know it. If I asked what exactly is love? How would you answer? How do you know your spouse loves you? There is no doubt in my mind that Maggie loves me. It is something that I just know. However, I think I'd be pretty hard pressed to explain to you how I know. Can you put that into words; just exactly how you know your spouse loves you? And the love you have for your spouse is different from the love you have for your child. So now the question becomes, how many different types of love are there? According to C.S. Lewis there are four distinct types of love. The Four Loves is a book by C. S. Lewis which explores the nature of love from a Christian perspective. In his book he defines and discusses these four types. Affection is the first: he describes it as fondness through familiarity (a brotherly

love), especially between family members or people who have otherwise found themselves together by chance. It is described as the most natural, emotive, and widely diffused of loves: natural in that it is present without coercion. The second is Phileo, the love between friends. Friendship is the strong bond existing between people who share common interest or activity and is the least biological. The third type of love according to Lewis is Eros, which is love in the sense of 'being in love' or loving someone. Eros is the type of love you have for your spouse. When the word love is mentioned, this is the type of love most people immediately think about. The fourth type of love, however, is the one I believe Jesus was talking about. That is called agape love. Agape is the love that brings forth caring regardless of the circumstance. Agape love can be safe or unsafe. Lewis recognizes this as the greatest of loves, and sees it as a specifically Christian virtue. I really like that definition of agape love; the love that brings forth caring regardless of the circumstance. And the part I like the best is the last part, regardless of the circumstance. Sadly, that is the part that is toughest for us. It is easy to love some people. Look around this congregation. We all love each other, well, we do don't we? That's easy, that's what I call safe love. I love Maggie, Scott, Blair, Nancy and her family, my brother Jimmy and his family. I love you folks. That's safe love. I feel pretty sure all the people I just mentioned, you all included love me too. See, it's safe. I have certain friends that I love with that agape love. I know they love me the same way: safe love. It's easy to have agape love for those who have agape love for you. It's called safe love. Now, how about this thing I'm calling unsafe love. It's agape love too. Let me explain. When I was teaching high school, it was easy to love Billy. He was that student every teacher wanted in class. He came to class every day, he was prepared, made good grades. He was attentive, never a discipline problem, was quick to help others, was polite, etc, etc. That was safe love. But then we had Johnny. It was tough to love Johnny. He skipped class, was a discipline problem, was never prepared, a smart alec, and more than once was caught smoking dope out behind the agriculture shop, a real trouble maker. But wait a minute, Jesus said to love him too. Unsafe love. It's easy to love that person who always finds something nice to say to and about you. But what about that person who loves to talk junk about you behind your back. Jesus told us to love them too. Unsafe love. It's easy to love that neighbor who keeps his yard neat, comes over to offer you help, oh, here's a casserole because it's Thursday. You all know the kind I'm talking about; the neighbor we all want. It's safe to love them. But what about the neighbor who cuts his lawn once or twice a season. His dog is always on the loose, leaving presents in your yard. You constantly hear him screaming at his wife and kids, his stereo is always played way too loud, especially late at night. Jesus told us to love him too. Unsafe love.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. When Jesus Christ was alive, who did he associate with? How about the lepers, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, those who were possessed by demons; that's where you found Jesus. If I were to tell you Jesus was alive in human form today, where would you find him? Who would he be hanging out with? You could probably find him at an Aids Clinic. You could probably find him on the street corner talking to the prostitutes. You could probably find Him at the homeless shelter. You could probably find him around those with mental health issues. If we asked him, Jesus could tell us where all the gang hide-outs were; Jesus has been there. We could find Jesus in all the areas where we would find the opportunities to practice unsafe love. Jesus would be found in those areas specifically, the areas where the rest of us don't want to go. Matthew 28: 19-20: **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.** Make disciples of all nations, not just those who it is safe to love, but to those who make it unsafe to love as well.

We listened to a song earlier and I asked you to try to picture this man as he sang the song. How did you see him? Was he up on a stage, maybe in front of a choir? Maybe you could even see him singing at a Billy Graham Crusade. It was a very powerful voice. How was he dressed? Maybe a little white-bread, you know, like me; khakis, a button down shirt, maybe a tie, probably in penny loafers, Wejuns for those of you who remember that brand name. Is that pretty much the way you pictured him? The man's name is David Middendorf. And yes, he used to be dressed just like I described. Here is a picture of David today. First time I saw David, my prejudices bubbled straight to the top. Long hair pulled back into a ponytail, do-rag on his head, Harley-Davidson t-shirt, black leather biker vest, adorned with biker club emblems. He had on jeans that were torn, a chain that ran from a belt loop to a biker's wallet, and he wore black biker boots. There were, as expected, several tattoos on his arms and his ears were pierced. Since that initial sighting, I have heard David sing several times. I have heard him preach the word of God. I have received Holy Communion from him.

Every time I am around David, I am in awe. David is from the Burlington/Elon area. When he was twelve, he gave his life to the Lord. Through the years, he worked for his church and eventually became the minister of music at his church. He taught music at Elon University. One weekend David went to a conference on how to reach the unchurched. One of the things he was taught was that to reach the unchurched you have to go to them. The other thing that happened that weekend was God put it on his heart to start a biker ministry. So he tried to begin one. In his khakis, his button down shirts, and his Wejuns he got nowhere. Bikers wanted absolutely nothing to do with him. Well, when in Rome, do as the Romans. The hair, the clothes, the tats, the earrings, he bought a Harley; he became a biker. Unsafe love. David left his comfort zone and practiced unsafe love. David started a biker ministry. It has been extremely successful. Through his efforts, numerous persons have been saved and there are now several Christian biker ministries going into those areas where most of us are scared to go.

I can see the wheels turning in several of your heads right now: No, Guerry, I'm not going to try to start some biker ministry in Greenville. And no, I'm not going to ask you to. What I am going to ask you to do though, is to consider some unsafe love. We can't sit here each Sunday morning and say to the world, her we are, y'all come join us. Guess what, people can't hear us outside these walls on Sunday morning. If you want to reach the unchurched, you have to go where they are. Let me say that again, if you want to reach the unchurched, you have to go where they are. Every one of us, myself included, have some friends who are unchurched. Are you willing to tell them what Jesus has done in your life? Agape love, unsafe love. You don't have to start big like David did. Start small with that one unchurched friend. Take them a casserole, just because. Send them a card, just because. Take them to a movie, just because. Take them out to dinner, just because. Do something really nice for them, just because. Do it just because Jesus said, **A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**

Amen