



One Step at a Time  
Sermon on John 14:15-21  
Pastor Julie McCain, May 25, 2014

This week we are back on the day before Jesus' crucifixion, in the middle of Jesus' long goodbye. And as Pastor Scott explained, knowing that they will no longer be able to see and smell and touch their Savior, we can assume the disciples have all kinds of emotions running through them. It makes all kinds of sense that Jesus comforts them, with words like: "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and "I go to prepare a place for you."

But as Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples, comfort isn't all he gives. He also challenges them, and us: "If you love me you will keep my commandments". Now of course we all know the 10 commandments, but in John's Gospel, several times Jesus gives us a new commandment: "that you love one another as I have loved you."

**So I've got a question for you: What kinds of people did Jesus love when he walked the earth?** -Outcasts, lepers, sinners, the unlovable, all people

It sounds like a weighty task to love the same kinds of people Jesus did. So first, I want to debunk that idea that we have to like someone in order to love them. We already know that we mean something different when we say I love you to our spouse or when we say I love you to our friend. These kinds of love come about because we see a quality in the other person that we like. We are naturally drawn to them, and come to love them over time.

- But you and I know all too well that there are also plenty of people whom we are not naturally drawn to.
- There are plenty of people who annoy and bother us, and with whom we do not want to develop a friendship.

But Jesus doesn't call us to be friends with every person; he calls us to love every person.

**So here's another question: How did Jesus show that love while he was on earth?**

-He was kind, respectful, healed people, fed people, listened to them, taught them, told them the truth, he died for them. Jesus isn't asking us to change how we feel about people, he's asking us to love them with our actions.

I had a high school religion teacher who used to tell us that love is not a feeling, but a habit, as much as putting on your left shoe before your right shoe is a habit, and the author C.S. Lewis agrees. He says this: "The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you feel "love" toward your neighbor; [simply] act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."

I'd like to tell you a story about me trying to learn to love someone I didn't really like. We'll call her Aubrie, and she moved to California in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. When I went up to talk to her on the first day of class, she proudly proclaimed that she was a billionaire African princess who was far too high class to ever be friends with me.

As you might expect in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, people quickly stopped trying to approach her and instead started gossiping about her. Aubrie looked different, too: she had very long, curly, black hair, which she messily & loosely piled on the top of her head, and while she sat in the front of the classroom trying to learn, whenever the teacher turned around, people in the back would take turns throwing staples into her hair. One day, I jumped on the bandwagon and threw staples at her, too. You see, Aubrie was kind to no one, bossy and arrogant toward everyone. I'm sure we all thought she deserved staples in her hair.

But being mean when she was mean to us got old. It leaves you with a weight in your belly, and heaviness in your chest, a burden that I'm sure Jesus doesn't want us to carry around. I didn't like that weight, so I simply started smiling at her when I saw her. Just a smile. And that heaviness started to fade. I didn't realize at the time that mine was probably the only smile she saw at school. After not too long, she started smiling back.

One day she smiled at me from her empty lunch table, so I left my friends to sit with her. It was just lunch. A few weeks later she invited me over to work on homework, and she told me she had been to 4 schools in the past 2 years, because everywhere she went people made fun of her. Finally her family had moved across the country. She also showed me her family's Hindu shrine in the backyard, and told me that every other person she showed it to had made fun of her for it. Suddenly Aubrie was a real person to me. Now we never became the best of friends, but I kept smiling at her, kept trying to be nice to her, and that weight in my belly never did come back.

Someone once asked Mother Theresa how she cared for so many people, and she said this: If you can't feed 500 people, feed one person. Mother Theresa is absolutely right. If you can't love everyone in your life, love one person. Start there. If you can't love one person, do one loving thing for them. Respect them. Listen to them. Smile at them. Start there.

Start there, with one person and one smile, and then trust Jesus with the rest:

- Trust Jesus to be hard at work in your heart and in theirs.
- Trust Jesus to pick you up and cover you in grace when you've been throwing staples in someone's hair and the weight in your belly is heavy.
- And trust Jesus to give you both strength for the next step and light for the whole journey. Amen.