

# Committed to Christ's People

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it'll be good for you to have your Bibles open to page 104, the passage that Bev just read. We are in the middle of a very short series, a three-part series on John 15, which talks about what it means that Jesus is the source of our life, that he is our vine and branches.

And what it means, very practically speaking, is three things. First, that we are committed to Christ, which Neil talked about last week. Secondly, that we're committed to Christ's people, this passage that we heard today.

And third, that we will be committed to Christ's world, which David Short will preach on next week, which is our Missions Sunday. And I think that the timing of this series is great.

I think Dave chose it because it was the beginning of the year. It's a good way for us to rededicate ourselves to the essentials of what it means to live out our life as followers of Christ.

But also, it's very appropriate that it takes place during the federal election as well. It's very appropriate because in this last week of campaigning, we've heard the platforms of all the parties released, although I think some of them were leaked from what I understand.

[ 1 : 19 ] And they are being discussed hotly. They define what the parties are about. They also talk about what it is that unites the party and what is their focus.

It points to the way for their possible government. And I think in the same way, these three commitments that is talked about in this sermon series are like the platform for every Christian church and for every Christian individually as well.

And it is a platform that Jesus has created. It defines us as followers of Jesus. It brings us together and it calls us forward into that platform.

And happily, it was leaked 2,000 years ago. And here it is. And I think that it's critical for us to re-examine them. Because the platform that we have is something that the world tries to distract us from.

It tells us things like this is something that is not popular enough. It doesn't attract enough people. You need to make changes in it to try to conform with the winds of thinking.

[ 2 : 31 ] And secondly, the world says it's too hard to follow through. Why set up something like this that doesn't make it easy for people? But the great thing about this platform is that you need to follow through with it as a Christian because Jesus personally guarantees its success.

Because he is the content of the platform, isn't he? He is the bread of life. Why wouldn't we commit our lives to him? He has the words of eternal life.

Where else would we go? Secondly, his people that we are meant to be committed to, they have been bought at a price. The price of his body dying on the cross for us.

We are his. He has created us. And thirdly, commitment to his world. It is his world. The world that he died for, that he loved so much, that he came to sacrifice himself to save that world, to transform it.

He is guaranteeing the future of that platform. Now, last week we talked about the first plank, what it meant to depend on Jesus for our very life, to abide in him, to bear fruit, and to be actually pruned by him as well, that he changes and transforms us.

[ 3 : 48 ] In this passage, verse 12 defines the second part of the plank. Look at that verse. Jesus says, This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

It is a very memorable thing to say. Something easy to remember if you are in an election campaign, if you are in a platform. One commentator said this.

He said, This command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and to appreciate, but it is also profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice.

And I think he is right. This was true for the first disciples that Jesus was talking. It would have been hard for them to put it into practice because they were 12 very different people.

They had different political parties they were coming from. They had different social classes they came out of. They were very different personalities, very different agendas as well.

[ 4 : 51 ] You know, they argued, Who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Fairly dysfunctional people. So we can relate to them. And here, on the night that he was betrayed, he gathers his disciples around him and he tells them, Here is my agenda for you.

Here is what it is going to look like for you to be committed to me when I leave you. And he says this. It will look like this. You must abide in my love by keeping my commandments.

And then the commandment he highlights is that very simple phrase, Love one another as I have loved you. And so you see, he doesn't say, Please get along when I'm gone.

Please make things peaceful. He says this. He says, I command you, There's no option, To love one another as I have loved you.

And to make clear exactly what kind of love that is, He says in verse 13, Greater love has no man than this, That a man lay down his life for his friends.

[ 5 : 58 ] You see, he's really commanding them to lay down their lives for each other. And he's commanding the church to do the same thing. This is a word for all of those generations of followers of Jesus.

And we know this because Paul, And we heard part of that in the reading from Romans 12, Says all over the New Testament the same thing that Jesus has said to us.

He constantly teaches, Love one another as Christ has loved you. And you know, we at St. John's are a lot like those disciples. We're a church with lots of differences.

I'm sure that a week from tomorrow, You will all be voting for every political party that is available to vote for. That is on offer. In fact, I understand that this is David's first federal election to vote in.

Because he's now a Canadian citizen. So if anybody has any ideas of who he should vote for, Please talk to him immediately following the service. He'll listen to you. We all have very different agendas.

[ 7 : 05 ] And different needs. We also have very different ideas about what is best for St. John's. And again, you can talk to David about that. We have very differing thinking about what this is going to be about as Christians.

But there are two critical things that Jesus says that you and I, all of us, with all our differences, have in common. And the first one is that we are related to Jesus Christ.

That's why we're called brothers and sisters of Christ. It is because he has loved us and died for us. He has made us his own. That's something you and I have in common.

It is the most important reality in this life. And it's something we share together. And second thing that we have in common is that we are actually commanded, each of us, to do the same exact thing.

And that is to be deeply committed to him and to love those who belong to him as well. So that when we obey that commandment to love one another as he has loved us, we live out the unity that God has given to us by making us related to one another and to him.

[ 8 : 21 ] When the local church lives out that great agenda that Jesus has given to us, all the other agendas, which seem so important in this world, are impossible to divide one another.

It's impossible for those things to separate us and to cause factions because of our commitment to that greater agenda that he has given to us. And Jesus really highlights that, that agenda to love one another.

In chapter 13, he calls it a new commandment. Now, this makes the disciples stand up and listen. A new commandment. And he says, and this is what it is, to love one another as I have loved you.

Now, the thing that I thought of when I read this is, and you're thinking it too, why is that a new commandment? If you know the Old Testament, this is something that Moses commanded.

It's what we read at the beginning of this service as well. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul. So, that's old.

[ 9 : 26 ] But what is new about that command? It is now based on Jesus revealing God's love to us by dying on the cross for us. So we know what God's love is.

1 John 3.16 says this. He says, This is how we know what love is. Jesus laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and our sisters.

Now, I love it when that reading is chosen for weddings. Because it really cuts to the heart of what a marriage relationship ought to be. That it is about sacrificial love.

It is about mirroring the love of Jesus for us. And it also is the love that characterizes or ought to characterize the church as well.

You see, when we know and experience what it is to have God himself lay his life down for us, we know that we are beloved. That we are precious in his sight.

[ 10 : 27 ] And that obeying Jesus flows naturally from this. We ought to love, it says, our brothers and our sisters. It is the only thing to do, knowing what love God has poured out on each of us.

And on the people we are meant to love in Jesus. So it is new because Jesus reveals God's love to us in his death. But it is also new because to love one another sacrificially is the essence of the new life that God has given to you and to me in Jesus.

It is the essence of the life of the new heaven and the new earth as well. Because it is actually the life of God himself. Look at verse 9.

This is an amazing verse. It says, As the Father has loved me, Jesus is saying this, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

You see what this is saying? Jesus, and then Jesus goes on to say it, love in that way, in the way that I have loved the Father and I have loved you as well, and the Father has loved me. Love in that way.

[ 11 : 32 ] And Jesus is revealing here the life and love of God, and he is calling us into that life as well. And that means we actually share in Jesus' life when we love one another sacrificially.

In John 17, Jesus prays something that is hard to understand, I think. He says this in his prayer two chapters later.

He says, I have given to the disciples, he is praying to God, the glory which you have given me. Now how do the disciples share God's glory? I mean, if we look at them, they do look like very inglorious types of people.

But the reason that Jesus says that is because they, in loving one another, will live out the glory of heaven. They will take part in the life of God.

They will be sharing what it is to be like Jesus to one another. It's as though they're having a foretaste of the perfect life of heaven in those acts of loving others as Christ has loved them.

[ 12 : 38 ] It is a glorious thing to do these things. And we often see it done unobtrusively. I know that happens in this congregation. Many acts of self-sacrificial love.

Those things which we don't see, which seem mundane, are glorious acts according to Jesus Christ. He is sharing his life. You are sharing in it when we do it.

And you know, we are looking, there's a window here in the relationship of God the Father and God the Son. And it is a privilege to see this revealed. And that's why he calls his disciples friends, he says.

I want to jump down actually to verse 15. And in verse 15, he says this. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends.

Why? Because all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You see the contrast. The servant doesn't know what the master is doing.

[ 13 : 40 ] The disciples will still be servants in the sense that they serve God and his purposes. But in terms of their intimacy with God, they are friends. Jesus reveals God's mind and his heart to the disciples and to us.

That's what it means that we are friends. And this is a great gift to us. This is the gift we have in God's word. He is making us friends as we are seeing who God is, seeing God revealed to us.

So Jesus is showing us in his living word God's plans and his promises for us and for the world. He is actually revealing God's heart and his mind to us.

The depth of his love is being shared with us. The relationship God has with the Son is open to our eyes, the eyes of our hearts. And so we continue.

We continue our lives as friends who know God. And I find this fact, that Jesus has loved us first and that he reveals God himself and his love to us, tremendously helpful.

[ 14 : 46 ] I need to know what God's heart is because it's sometimes not easy to love each other self-sacrificially. When we actually do it, it's one thing to say it, but to do it, our human nature gets in the way.

Our natural selfishness, our desire to be not inconvenienced, which is an important thing in our culture, don't be inconvenienced, that desire rears its ugly head.

And it's natural not to reach out and love those who are strangers. Or we don't share, we meet people we don't share much in common with or who might even annoy us and we think, those are people to stay away from.

But Jesus has revealed the very heart of God for me. He has loved us while we were enemies. And at his greatest convenience, greatest inconvenience, the death of his son, laying down his life for us, he has loved us sacrificially.

And that makes me want to want what he wants and to do what he commands. It changes the way that you look at others and yourself as well.

[ 15 : 57 ] There is a revolution, a transformation that happens in seeing the gospel, the heart of God revealed for us. And so there's the blessing of God's word to us.

Well, this passage closes with a call to action. And I think this is always a good way for a sermon to end as well. Because Jesus says in verse 16, that he chose his disciples, they didn't choose him, which is the normal way for a student and a rabbi or a teacher, any kind of great scholar in the ancient world.

The normal way was for students who are on a quest to follow that teacher. That's the normal way. But Jesus says, we did it differently. I chose you.

And there was a reason to go and bear fruit that will last and that that fruitfulness will be related to prayer. To asking, you asking the Father for what you need and what the church needs as well.

And so isn't it surprising here? He tells them to go. He doesn't tell them at that moment to go out to the ends of the earth. He tells them to go, first of all, to each other.

[ 17 : 10 ] So verse 17 says, again, he's emphasizing, love one another. I command you that. Love one another. And that's clearly our mandate as a church as well.

Each of us are missionaries, first sent to one another to live out the life of God to one another so that those who are outside the church can see that we are marked by self-sacrificial love.

That makes our witness to the world and our ability to share the gospel much more powerful. If we are coming from a community that loves one another sacrificially and are open to God's word to obey his commands in our relationships to one another, it's our mandate.

And the question is, as we close the sermon, is what does that look like practically? Because we have challenges in a big church. We come from all kinds of different parts of the lower mainland. It's large.

It's easy not to know everybody. It's actually easy to be anonymous here as well. Well, the first practical thing that this means for us is that you really can't obey Jesus in this passage unless you go to church.

[ 18 : 22 ] How do you love someone sacrificially if you don't know them? How do you love them sacrificially and forgive and learn how to pray for them if you don't see them or interrelate?

And how do you forgive if nobody offends you because you didn't go to church to get offended? One of the reasons we come week to week is to live that command out, to have opportunities to love as Jesus loved us.

You know, often when you think of why do I go to church? You think of the sermon or singing together or having fellowship together. Jesus doesn't say that. He says, all those things might be true, but he says, the reason you go to church first and foremost is to love one another as Jesus has loved you, that the gospel will change your relationships with one another.

That's a process that takes a lifetime. And secondly, the second practical thing about this command is that it means giving up our lives in love by putting ourselves out.

It means inconvenience. It means that we might not enjoy it at first. But Jesus in this passage promises you joy to the full as you love people in the church sacrificially.

[ 19 : 40 ] And there are examples of this that people can share with you, I'm sure. One person this week when we were talking about the passage said that when they first came to church here at St. John's, they made it their aim to actually talk to somebody that they didn't know or who was alone, a new person, every week.

And as they got to know people in the church, they then decided that they wouldn't first go to that group of people that they know well. They would go to a person they didn't know still first and speak with them and to follow them up afterwards as well.

And there was blessing that came through that. It doesn't come naturally, but it's a following of that command to love others as Christ has loved us. And third, this passage doesn't only mean that we need to come to church, that we need to actually be intentional about looking for people to love.

It also means praying for people in the church and for the work of the church and seeing powerful, real results to those prayers. That's what verse 16 is, isn't it?

Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. You see, the prayers that we give in response to Jesus, what he has done for us, will be shaped by the gospel, by what he has done for us.

[ 21 : 01 ] And we will pray for people out of the love of Christ for them. Now, Catherine and I have experienced firsthand people in the church praying for us.

People who we don't know at all and didn't know but do now, but also people who knew us quite well. We have experienced people praying for us as we grieved the loss of a child and rejoiced in the birth of a new baby boy four months ago.

And as I said, some who prayed for us were very close to us, some didn't know us at all. Yet all of these prayers deeply affected us and we saw God work powerfully through them.

We saw God answer them in very real ways. We saw his grace in darkness and his grace in times of great joy. And so those prayers for us were expressions of joy.

It was like the first reading that we heard today from Romans that people were weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. See, prayers are an expression of that commandment to love one another as Christ has loved us.

[ 22 : 11 ] And the church is strengthened by those kinds of prayers. Jesus says when you are obeying and loving Jesus in your relationship, your prayers are shaped by that.

and God will give you what you ask him. It's a remarkable promise. And so I close by saying, you know, as we look back at 2005, in fact, years before that as well, and we look ahead to what God has for St. John's in 2006, we see that this is particularly right now a time to work on our commitment to Christ's people.

That second plank in the platform. And the reason for that is, number one, there has been losses of key people in our congregation.

People have died who have meant much to us, much to this church, much to their families and friends. And there is a need for ongoing love and prayer for those family and friends, but also prayer for the whole church who really grieve that loss.

But secondly, we've also been taking a stand which has been meant sacrifice for this church as well, a stand for orthodoxy, a stand for the truth of the gospel that transforms us, that changes us into his image.

[ 23 : 26 ] But at the same time, there is a future with many possibilities to choose from, many new ways that we can minister God's, the gospel of Jesus to the world.

And so it's a time of decision making, a time to love each other and pray for each other in times of hardship and in times of difficult decision making.

And so I invite you on February 7th to pray with us, to pray for our vestry meeting in the middle of February as we meet together for our monthly prayer meeting. We're going to focus on what God has for us in our future and to lift one another up in prayer this way.

And so may God give us grace by his mighty power to follow through with that uncompromising command of Jesus, love one another as I have loved you.

And may we know his joy in our own lives but also his joy in our congregation as a whole as we carry through with that promise that Jesus has revealed to us.

[ 24 : 30 ] Amen.