

God's With-ness

April 21, 2019

Has anyone here this morning ever felt all alone, or discouraged or confused or disheartened? Anyone ever felt like life just has not turned out at all like it was supposed to or at least you'd hoped it would? Well, welcome to the life of Jesus' disciples shortly after they left the Upper Room, after sharing the Passover meal with Jesus. Jesus knew what was going to be happening to these disciples that he'd invested nearly 3 ½ years teaching them and showing them who God is.

In those 3 ½ years they'd learned that God is quite unlike who they'd been taught He was.

- They discovered that God was not an angry, vengeful God but rather that He was a God who loved His children – all of them, regardless of what they'd done or who they'd become through the various choices they made in life.
- They discovered that God wanted them and saw the best in them.
- They discovered that no one was outside of God's grace and love: not tax collectors, not prostitutes, not those who had been married and divorced multiple times and now was living with her boyfriend, not the blind or mute or crippled. Jesus shockingly reached out and touched lepers and recognized 2 Gentiles as people of "great faith". He spared the life of a woman caught in adultery and he used a Samaritan and a rebel son as the heroes of his parables.
- They'd seen this Jesus walk on water, feed huge crowds with very little food, rebuke the wind and waves with a command and commanded demons to exit people's lives and they ran away in fear. No doubt, in their minds, as they gathered in that Upper Room, their lives had been turned upside down and they were brimming with confidence that this surely must be the Messiah that all of Israel had been waiting for and anticipating for hundreds of years.

But Jesus knew something they didn't know. That in a few short hours everything was going to be turned upside down in their world. That they'd feel all alone and quite confused and anxious and fearful and not knowing what to do next, as many of you have felt at times in your life. Jesus knew this would be the effect of his death on the cross. And so, he gathered his disciples in this Upper Room to try to prepare them for what was going to happen. And in that Upper Room he taught them many things. But perhaps the most important teaching was what J.J. captured in his talk around the communion table. Jesus tried to convey a sense of intimacy with his disciples that he hadn't prior to this.

- He called them "friends" instead of servants.
- He told them that their life needed to come from their deep connection with Him and He used the analogy of the branches dependency upon the Vine to convey this truth.
- He showed them his deep love for them by washing their feet in the beginning of the evening. And think with me for just a moment, Jesus washed the feet of the very man, Judas, who was going to shortly betray him for 30 pieces of silver. How would you feel if you were asked to wash the person of someone who betrayed you?
- But I think perhaps the most important thing Jesus did for those disciples and does for us as well is to give us the promise that we will never really be alone. That He's never going to abandon us or betray us or leave us alone. Jesus knew full well that in a few short hours they were going to be huddled behind locked doors in stunned silence wondering how they could have been so wrong about Jesus.

And so much of what Jesus taught his disciples and us is that, while He physically would be leaving them, he's not going to leave us as orphans. He will give us His very presence to live within us through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Listen to this promise as it came out of Jesus' very mouth.

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." (John 14:15-18, 23)

Now let me ask you – what jumps out to you in this passage?

To some of you it may be Jesus' insistence on us *"keeping his commands"*. And the reason that jumps out to is perhaps the reason you haven't been pursuing a relationship with Jesus. Because your perception of Christianity is that it's all about keeping a list of rules and commandments. And perhaps that's why you may have walked away from Jesus after being forced to go to church growing up. But let me point out the commands that I believe Jesus is referring to.

Just a few minutes prior to this in his time trying to prepare his disciples for life after he's gone he says:

"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." (John 13:34-35)

Loving one another isn't a new concept or even a new commandment. What makes it new is the extent of this love – *"as I have loved you"*. Now, at this moment in time clearly they didn't know the full extent of Jesus' love for them, but in a few short hours they'd see it with their very own eyes as they witnessed Jesus giving up his life on a cross for their sins.

Typically in wedding vows the couple will each commit to loving the other person. Hopefully, that's not seen as a **burdensome straight jacket**, and if it is then they should reconsider getting married. No, when you love someone it's a joy to love them. When you're in love you think of how to honor that person, how to "make their day special". You get excited by even thinking of the other person, and it even feeds you emotionally when you show them little acts of love. Your heart lights up when you see them and when you anticipate spending time with them.

So, also it ought to be in a relationship with Jesus. Jesus' is teaching them that if they really love Him, then their love for Him **ought to overflow in how they treat one another**. And the world ought to rightly sit up and take notice. And amazingly that was one of the most striking things about the early Christians. Literature outside of the Bible, records non-Christians and world leaders taking notice of how well the Christians take care of each other and even those outside of their group of believers. Christians showed their love by meeting one another's needs as well as the needs of nonbelievers. What an amazing testimony to God's love and power working inside of them.

I saw this type of love and compassion for others first hand Friday night at our Hope Restored outreach event. Just prior to us going out and hosting the event where we tell the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, one of the hosts was sharing how they found themselves a bit apprehensive prior to the event. Because with so much animosity and sometimes violence towards Christians in our society, we're putting ourselves in a pretty vulnerable spot being quite visible right off of Highway 7. But as this individual prayed through their apprehension, they were brought to the realization that God is in us and He is the one in charge of the outcome of this and every other area of our lives. And the ultimate goal is that God might be glorified through our efforts at this event and that needs to be our primary agenda. Well it just so happens, that the very first encounter we had with anyone that night, was when a local man walked by and begin shouting at us: **"Die, Die, all of you Die!!!"** An immediate response was that we'd pray for him to which he replied, **"Pray for yourselves. And then continued on with "Die Die, all of you Die!!!"** But what I observed was that immediately we began praying for this man and that God would set him free from whatever was keeping him filled with hatred and anger. That's taking Jesus' command to obey him to the everyday life level. It's taking merely knowing Jesus' command and putting it into action. And through the rest of that night and last night as well the same gentlemen kept walking past us. And last night we attempted to offer him a free Buster Bar. I don't know if we made any kind of difference in this man's life – but I do know we honored God through our acts of love rather than hate.

So, hopefully you see that obeying Jesus' commands is all about relationships - both with Him and with others. Our love for Jesus ought to naturally flow out into your relationships with others.

The second thing that hopefully stands out from Jesus' instruction in the Upper Room is **His promise to not leave us alone**. Jesus was no doubt concerned that the disciples would feel abandoned by Him. And He wanted to make sure that didn't happen, both when He went to the cross but also after He ascended to heaven. Notice Jesus' terminology. It's not just that He's going to give each of us God's presence to come dwell within us but it's also about **making a home together**. A home is where families bond and laugh and cry and go through life together. A home is intended to be a safe haven, a place that **we get energy from** and where we can go and know that **we will be accepted just as we are**. And that's what Jesus is promising. This promise has been God's desire from the very beginning.

Since the moment God created us He wanted and intended for us to have a relationship of love with Him. He had it with **Adam and Eve** before sin entered in and since that very moment God's been working to reestablish His relationship with us. And He invites us into that incredible relationship by accepting Jesus' offer of grace and forgiveness. God wanted this relationship so bad that He left heaven and came down to earth in order to die on a cross thereby paying the penalty for your sin and mine.

But it's always been about God's desire for a relationship with you. One person described it as God's **"With-ness" with us**.

Remember when the angel came to announce to Mary that she would be pregnant with the Son of God, the angel said that the baby's name would be *Immanuel, which means "God with us"*. And that's exactly what Christ represented when he came. People were able to get a clearer picture of the character and nature of God as they watched Jesus.

Back to the Upper Room. Jesus says that His leaving them is actually a very good thing because once He leaves the Holy Spirit will come and live not just with us but will live inside of every believer.

Jesus repeated this truth to the disciples after his resurrection when He gave the disciples instructions on what to do next.

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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.**"* (Matthew 28:18-20)

How long is Jesus going to with you? Forever and ever. He never leaves us. He now lives within you. So, great news – you're never alone.

Throughout the rest of the New Testament the authors reiterate how God is the one living inside of us and that the key is for us to learn to let Christ carry out His will in and through us.

The apostle Paul captured this well in **Galatians 2:20**

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Notice how the apostle John puts it

1 John 4:12-13 (NIV) *No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.*

People see God living in us as His love flows through us to others.

Invitation: If you'd like to accept Jesus into our life and begin to allow Him to lead you and love you from the inside out then we invite you to come as we stand and sing our Hymn of Invitation – Just as I am.

God's *With-ness*
April 21, 2019

The disciples discovered about God:

- God _____ His children – regardless of their past
- God _____ them and saw the _____ in them
- No one is _____ of God's grace and love

Jesus taught intimacy with himself by:

- He called them “_____” instead of “_____”
- Their life needs to come from their _____ with Him
- He _____ their _____
- He promised to not _____ them

What does it mean to keep Jesus' commands?

What parameters does Jesus put on their love?

What significant promise did Jesus give them and us?

How did Paul live his life according to Galatians 2:20?

What's God's plan to be seen in this world? (1 John 4:12-13)

Application:

How has God come to you in your loneliness?

If you were someone's only glimpse of God, how would they describe God?

God's *With-ness*
April 21, 2019

The disciples discovered about God:

- God _____ His children – regardless of their past
- God _____ them and saw the _____ in them
- No one is _____ of God's grace and love

Jesus taught intimacy with himself by:

- He called them “_____” instead of “_____”
- Their life needs to come from their _____ with Him
- He _____ their _____
- He promised to not _____ them

What does it mean to keep Jesus' commands?

What parameters does Jesus put on their love?

What significant promise did Jesus give them and us?

How did Paul live his life according to Galatians 2:20?

What's God's plan to be seen in this world? (1 John 4:12-13)

Application:

How has God come to you in your loneliness?

If you were someone's only glimpse of God, how would they describe God?