

John 13:31-35

Imagine someone coming to our little corner of Wisconsin from a foreign country. There are all sorts of **important** adjustments they'd need to make in order to feel like they really **fit in** - ranging from the kind of **clothes** they wear, to the kind of **food** they eat, to the way they **speak**. There are also a number of different **cultural** oddities which are specific to our area. For example, they really should learn how to tell the difference between a **Packer** fan and a **Viking** fan. There are certainly **clues** which can help them out with that. If a person has a "**Rogers** for President" bumper sticker on his car, he's probably a **Packer** fan, and if it's a "**Cousins** for President" bumper sticker, he's probably a **Viking** fan. If you notice that 90-95% of the clothes a person wears are **green** and **gold**, he's probably a **Packer** fan. And if those clothes are **purple** and **white**, you guessed it, he's probably a **Viking** fan.

Actually, our clothes say a **lot** about who we are. If a person wears a lot of camo, they probably enjoy **hunting** and **fishing**. And if they are always seen in a three-piece business suit, they're probably not from around here. But how can a person tell that we are **Christians**? Are there **outward clues** which would show them that we're followers of **Jesus**? They might notice some **religious art** in our homes, or a **cross necklace** or **lapel pin**. But a far more **accurate** clue is one that comes from the **inside**. As we look at the words Jesus spoke to His disciples in today's sermon text, the truth comes through loud and clear, that **Christians Are Known By Their Love**.

Our text begins with the words, "*when **he** was **gone**.*" These words are speaking about **Judas**. They give us **references** relating to **when** Jesus **spoke** the words of our text. The **location** is the upper room in **Jerusalem**, and the **day** is Maundy **Thursday**. Jesus had just told His disciples that **one** of them was going to **betray** Him. He even pointed out **who** that betrayer would **be** - the man called **Judas Iscariot**. Before Judas left the room, Jesus told him, "*What you are about to do, do more **quickly**.*" Jesus knew that His **betrayal** was **close** at hand - in fact, it was only **hours** away. And Jesus also knew that His **arrest** in the Garden of Gethsemane would quickly be followed by His **crucifixion**. The hours which He still had left with His disciples were quickly **ebbing away**. And that's why He told them, "*Now the Son of Man is **glorified**, and God is glorified **in him**. If **God** is glorified **in him**, God will also glorify the **Son** in **himself** and will glorify him **at once**.*"

Jesus knew **exactly** what was coming, but He **also** knew that His **disciples** weren't fully **prepared** for the things which would happen in the days ahead. After Jesus **left** them, and ascended into **heaven**, they would have to make many **choices** about where they should **go**, and what they should **do**. Jesus wanted to give them some information which would help to **guide** them through the difficult times which were coming. So He told them, "*Dear children, I am going to 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. A **new commandment** I give you: **Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.***"

Jesus wanted to leave His disciples with this **one** command - that they should have **love** for one another. That wasn't going to be **easy**, because the disciples were very **different** from one another. There would be times when they would be tempted to do just the **opposite** of Jesus' command. They'd be tempted to be **unloving** - to **argue** about who was the **greatest** among them - to **fight** about who should take the **leadership** role now that **Jesus** was gone. The days that were coming would give them every opportunity to **look down** on one another - or to **gossip** about one another - or even to **slander** one another. But that's why Jesus gave them this command **before** He left them and ascended into heaven. Jesus wanted to leave His disciples with a **distinct identity**. **Christians Are Known By Their Love.**

Those words of Jesus still apply to us **today**. We are His **followers**, just as those **first** disciples were, so Jesus has also commanded **us** to have **love** for one another. The temptations which the **first** disciples faced, are the **same** temptations which **we** face. We're tempted to **think** and to **act** in ways that are **unloving**. We're tempted to show love toward **some** people, but not to **all** of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We're tempted to turn our **backs** on some people, because their personality and interests don't match **ours**. We're tempted to **look down** on others - to **talk** about them behind their backs - even to **slander** them, in order to make **ourselves** look **better** by comparison. We're tempted to let our **pride** get in the way of our **Christianity**, and when that happens, we're showing the world who we **were** - **not** who we **are**.

**Christians Are Known By Their Love**, so we need to understand just how **damaging** it is when we aren't **showing** our love toward others. When Christians act in an **unloving** way toward each other, not only are we damaging the body of **Christ**, by eroding away the **unity** we possess in Jesus - but we're also giving the wrong impression to **unbelievers** about what it means to be a Christian. We're

**misrepresenting** our Savior. Jesus has shown such a **deep love** for **us**, that we can't **help** but respond with **love** toward Him, and toward everyone **else** too.

When Jesus commanded His disciples to **love** one another, He was telling them to **give** out of the love which they had already **received** from **Him**. Remember what He said, "*Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another.*" **Their** love for one another, was to be a **reflection** of **Jesus'** love for **them**. That's true for **us** too, and no matter how **miserable** our lives might be, we **can't say** that we haven't been **loved** by Jesus. He **lovingly** went to the cross to bring us **eternal life** and **salvation**. He **lovingly** provides us with **every** physical gift which we need to **survive** in this life. He **lovingly** brought us into His **family** through Holy **Baptism**. He **lovingly** provides us with **comfort**, **guidance**, and **strength** through His holy **Word**. And He **lovingly** offers us the **forgiveness** of **sins** through the Lord's **Supper**.

But Jesus also knows how **difficult** it is for us to follow through in **reflecting** that love in our **thoughts**, **words**, and **actions**. Jesus knew full well that His **first** disciples **couldn't** keep His command **perfectly** - and neither can **we**. Jesus knows that we're **sinful** human beings - that we're **incapable** of showing **perfect** love. And it was for that very **reason**, that Jesus sacrificed **His** perfect life on the **cross**. That's where we see **perfect love** in action - in **Jesus** on the cross - suffering and **dying** to pay for the sins of the world. Jesus did what we're **incapable** of doing - He put **others** - including **every** sinner on earth - ahead of **Himself**. On the cross, He bore the punishment for every unloving **thought** which pushes its way into our minds - for every unloving **word** ever spoken by our lips, and for every unloving **action** ever performed by us. His **perfect**, **selfless** sacrifice is love in **action**.

If we want to get better at **following** Jesus' command and showing **love** to one another, we have to go back to the **source**. We can't **give** something that we don't **have**. But as we've already **seen**, we have **received** the love of God in great **abundance**, and we **continue** to receive that love through the **Means of Grace** - the **Gospel** in God's **Word** and the **Sacraments**. The more Christ's love is **poured out** on **us** through the Gospel, the more it **wells up** and **overflows** in the way we interact with **others**. **Christians Are Known By Their Love**.

We should probably take just a moment to look at one more thing - and that is that this **love** which we have received from God isn't something which we don't **have** any more when we **give** it to **others**. That's **not** the way things **usually** work. If I have \$100, and I give it to **you**, I don't **have** it anymore. But, it's **different** with

the **love of God**. No matter **how often** we give God's love to others, we still **have** God's love **ourselves**. That means we can **continually** reflect God's love in our lives. We can provide **comfort** for those who are **hurting** - we can provide **companionship** for those who are **lonely** - we can **admonish** those who need **correction**, and we can **encourage** those who are **downhearted**. We can **share** God's Word with them, to bring them **exactly** what they need, **exactly** at the **time** they need it. The **comfort** found in the forgiveness and peace of the Gospel is **always** available, and it needs to be **shared**. **We** are the ones who can **share** it with them, because **Christians Are Known By Their Love**.

When the people of our world **see us sharing** with others the genuine **love** that we have been **given**, they will want to be part of it too. And what a **joy** it will be to **share** the love of Jesus with them as well. May we pray today and always that the Lord would continue to show His amazing **love** to us, and that we may have **many opportunities** to **share** His love with those around us, because **Christians Are Known By Their Love**. Amen.