

What Does it Mean to Love Jesus

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's gospel reading is a continuation of last week's gospel text. Today, Jesus is preparing the disciples that he will leave them. He reassures them that when he is gone the Father will send them an advocate, the Holy Spirit to be with them. At the end of this short passage, Jesus reminds us that he is in us. He ends this passage with the words, "Those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Each time I read the gospel text for today, I kept thinking about the question, what does it mean to love Jesus? As I thought about it for a while, many different scripture texts continued to come to mind. "If you do it to the least of these you have done it to me." There is no Jew, no Greek, no slave or free." But ultimately,

I kept coming back to “Those who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me.” Although the word commandments is plural in this sentence, I think Jesus is referring back to the greatest commandment – that we have love one another as Jesus has loved us. The commandments, when followed show God’s love to others. Gerard Sloyan writes in the Interpretation Commentary on the Gospel of John that “Obedience is the hallmark of Jesus’ disciples, the proof that they love. God will love the lovers of the Son in a special way. The Son, in turn, will reciprocate the love of the individual disciple...” Our love for others is emphasized in the gospel of John as an attribute of being a disciple.

Thinking about the greatest commandment – what does it mean to love Jesus? We love one another. The way we treat others is a reflection of our love of Jesus.

Earlier this week as I was working on my sermon, Barbara Harris stopped in to do some things in the office and we were talking about my sermon for today and I was explaining to her what I was thinking - that loving Jesus means that we love on

another. And we talked for a while and Barbara said this most amazing thing – she said that yes, it's loving one another and it is also asking yourself, do I see Jesus in the person or the people that surround me?

Loving Jesus is twofold: it is loving others and also letting Jesus shine through in our words and our actions for other people to see.

So, how do we love Jesus? It's more than a warm fuzzy feeling. It's a relationship that is messy. After all, being in a relationship with someone is always a bed of roses. We are challenged and stretched to do things that we may not want to do. Being in a relationship with Jesus means thinking about people other than ourselves.

We live in a culture where looking out for number one seems to be our focus. In many cases it seems that our decisions are made to the end of what is best for me?

Or what is best for my family? I know for me, many of the decisions that I make are for my benefit and may not let Jesus shine through for others to see.

When we love others as Jesus loved us, we have to try to break down barriers that we create. We need to ask ourselves hard questions. Why aren't we reaching out to the person who seems to be emotional? Why aren't we giving food to the poor? What are our mental blocks that prevent us from reaching out or letting Jesus shine through in our lives?

It's hard to love others and let God's love shine through. We all have our hang-ups and our comforts, but God calls us to love others, which just isn't a warm fuzzy feeling. Sometimes we might give a gentle reminder to someone that they may not be doing the right thing. In love we hold one another accountable for our actions.

Loving Jesus means loving others and letting others see Jesus in us.

Last weekend, I witnessed both aspects of what it means to love Jesus from some of our middle school youth. Before I tell you the story, I'd like to give a brief snapshot of what pressures our middle school youth face day in and day out.

Middle school can be difficult. It seems to be the time in young people's lives where they are trying to figure out who they are. Groups of friends are formed. One's hair and make-up need to be kept just so or the ridicule that one might receive from their peers could be devastating. It seems that if someone is different at this age they can sometimes be forgotten or picked on relentlessly. It is a difficult time in a young person's life.

At the retreat/lock-in at Point Lookout the youth got up on Saturday morning and wanted to go to the beach. One of the youth with us has cerebral palsy and has trouble putting on his shoes by himself. This young man asked a group of young women if they would help him with his shoes. Without hesitation, the girls responded, with a resounding yes – we will help you so we all can go to the beach

together. The young women helped the young man and they all went to the beach together.

The young man wasn't afraid to ask the young women for help. He was comfortable in asking because of getting to know one another throughout the evening. The young women ignored the difference and reached out to help.

What a great example our youth have given to us of what it means to love Jesus by loving others.

Amen.