

“All Together, Now, Part 1:
The Urgency of ‘One-Anothering’ ”
John 13:31-38; Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

I’m glad you are here. Today we are turning a corner in the life of our church.

When I came a year ago, the elders decided to adopt “up, in, and out” as our theme for the year, and we’re going to stick with it for a couple more years. What is “up, in and out”?

“Up” is about our relationship to God: knowing his Son, rejoicing in his Spirit, learning his Word, worshipping and praying as individuals and as a congregation.

“In” is about our relationship to one another in the body of Christ.

“Out” is about our relationship to the world; our mission to show and tell Christ’s love to our neighbors near and far.

This is nothing new, nothing fancy. In fact, every real church does up, in, and out. We’re saying it, and we’re committing to it, because we want to make sure that we’re not just a real church, but a church that’s learning how to do what every real church does, better and better.

The first year we focused on “Up.” We had a sermon series on Colossians, asking “Who is Jesus?” and celebrating all the ways in which he is wonderful. We learned how to read an OT book like Ruth as a gospel story that’s really all about Jesus. We started our Bible@10 studies to know God’s Word better.

We’re going to keep going “up,” of course, cause we’re a real church. But starting today, we are going “In.” From now until Advent, every sermon is going to be focused on our movement “in.”

For the next 8 weeks, each morning and evening will be about a unique “One Another” command in the New Testament. Toward the end of October, I’ll spend 6 weeks in the morning preaching on Proverbs for “wisdom for One-Anothering.” Sam will spend 6 weeks in the evening preaching on Old Testament “narratives for One-Anothering.”

And today we begin our focus on the true church’s movement “in” with the most basic, foundational command---the first and greatest and really the final “one-anothering” command. Many of these “one anotherings”---there’s 59 of these commands in the New

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Testament---will come from Paul and John and Peter. But this first one comes right from the mouth of Jesus himself.

The command comes right in the middle of our passage: verse 34 and 35:

“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.”

How does that feel to you? Maybe it feels great. Maybe you think, “yeah, this is exactly what Christianity is really all about. The love. Not the rules. Christianity would be a lot more attractive to people if we wouldn’t worry so much about specific beliefs and moral teaching, and just love each other.”

Or maybe you think “oh great. 8 weeks plus 6 weeks makes 14 weeks of nothing but love love love? No doctrine? No ethics? Just *love*? What are we now, a bunch of hippies? Christianity is about what Jesus has done for us, and about how to be holy. Not about some vague idea of “loving people.”

Actually, you’re both going to be disappointed. Because, yes, there’s going to be “love one another,” over and over, for the next 14 weeks. But a few weeks from now, you’re going to realize that this is *not* easy. That doing it well is not always *simple*. That, in fact, it is so hard to love one another, even just inside the church, with people who are a lot like you, who at least share your core beliefs, that, in order to even get started loving one another well, you’re going to need to know Jesus so well---who he is, what he’s done, what he is still doing, and what he will do. In order to love people in the church so thoroughly that it makes Christian faith attractive to outsiders, you’re going to have to be committed to working on your own heart, so that when you give it in love to others, what you’re giving them is not toxic, but it’s actually the love of Jesus, pure and strong.

Love one another. It’s two nice verses in the middle of our passage. But the rest of it is kind of sad! At both the beginning and end of the passage is the catastrophic failure of two of Jesus’ closest followers. “When he had gone out” (31) is about Judas betraying Jesus and his disciples, just when they needed him most. Then at the end of our passage (38), Jesus

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tells his top disciple that, he’s not going to be as brave and loyal as he thinks. Peter the “rock” is going to crumble in fear and deny him that very night.

And the other verses here are also sad, because Jesus is telling his closest friends that he’s going away. And they can’t follow right now.

It’s got this “love” stuff right in the middle. But it’s a sad, dark passage. In fact, just before our passage starts, verse 30, John says “And it was night.” The whole thing literally happens as darkness falls.

And actually, when the passage isn’t sharing sad news, it’s giving really difficult commands. Verse 34: you must love one another. Verse 35: your success or failure with this task is going to be on display for the whole world, so don’t fail. In fact, when you succeed, you’ll be showing the world that you belong to the one who loves first and best---me. When you fail, you’ll be preaching a loveless sermon with your unloving lives that makes me look like a Savior who’s lacking in love. Don’t do that.

In fact, Jesus is issuing an impossible command. Demonstrate supernatural love to very natural, very sinful, very stubborn people. Love the kind of people who will fail in catastrophic ways like Peter, who lied about even knowing Jesus. Love the kind of people who will have a hard time *getting* this whole “Christian thing” like James and John, who even in the last month of Jesus’ life are trying to get power and position from Jesus instead of the grace and forgiveness they need. And if we fail, we don’t just fail each other: we fail God.

One-anothering is URGENT. It’s our great task. Loving one another is ultimately what all the one-anothering commands of the New Testament are really all about. Loving one another is urgent. It is urgent because the very reputation of Jesus in the world depends on it.

Are you ready? Let’s go love one another so the world will know we are Jesus’ disciples!

I have heard someone say that for every look you take at your own sin, you need to take five looks at the grace of Christ. But don’t forget this, too: if you are going to be part of a community that exercises radical love, the kind of love that covers a multitude of sins, the kind of love that makes the world see the radical love of the Savior, then for every look you

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take at a *fellow Christian’s sin*, you’re going to have to take five looks at the grace of Christ. To look at a fellow Christian *at all*, and to see them in love, you’re going to have to be staring at Jesus.

Look at him. Hear him naming your sin. And then hear the tenderness and love in his voice as he names it. And the hope in his voice as he nevertheless names himself the lover of *your* soul. And *then*, with all of *that* filling your eyes and heart and ears, cover over the sins of your fellow Christians with grace and truth and forgiveness.

You can only do this because Jesus has already done it---both for them, this sinner that you’re next to in worship or in Bible study or at coffee hour---and for *you*, this sinner you see every time you look honestly in the mirror. *You* are the really tough-to-love person inside the church.

And so, you’ve got to hear and remember what John says at the very beginning of this difficult chapter:

John 13:1: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

Where’s Jesus *going*? He says he’s going, immediately (31), to glorify his Father, and to be glorified *by* his Father. He’s going two places. And he has to go to both of these places first, alone. First, to give up his life, loving his disciples all the way to the end, at the cross. Dying so that they might have life. Second, he’s going to rise and go victoriously to his Father’s right hand in heaven.

Jesus says that soon his people will do the same two things. You’ll follow later, verse 36. Jesus will do it first and best. But to follow Jesus, you too will first need to be ready to give up your life, either suddenly, or over and over again each day, or maybe both, in self-giving love for one another. And then at last you’ll follow Jesus in his resurrection and in his glorious return to his Father and yours.

This is a dark passage. A difficult passage. But there’s glory. After darkness, light. For Jesus. For you and me as we follow him, loving one another today, tomorrow, till the end. Because Jesus has first loved you

So will you?