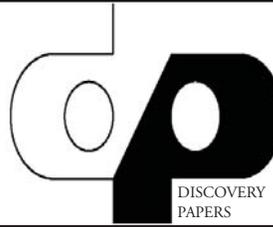




SIMPLE LOVE



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John 13:31-14:14
28th Message
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House projects are not my favorite thing. They always seem to take longer and involve way more complications than they need to. We had scheduled a Superbowl party for a few weeks after we moved into the home we're in now. I wanted to wire the main room for surround sound. Sounds easy, right?

So I climbed up in the attic and started drilling through the ceiling beam to get into the space between the walls to run the wires. But it turns out that my cordless drill wasn't powerful enough. So I get out the corded drill. Then I keep drilling, but never get through the piece of wood. I eventually drilled so long that I broke my drill bit. So then I have to go get a longer drill bit. Then I start drilling some more and I'm still not making it all the way through the wood. It seems that every spot I pick must line up with a vertical support that I'm drilling into.

Finally, I just decide to keep drilling as long as I can and see what happens. So I do and eventually, I drill all the way through the ceiling beam, which turned out to be three different beams, laid on top of each other. That's why it took me so long to drill through them. Now, of course, I have to figure out how to run wires and the complications had just begun. I won't even go into finding the right wires and sockets.

Sometimes things end up being harder than they need to be. Something simple becomes complicated. And you feel like it all could have been avoided if you had just done things a bit differently.

Do you ever feel that way about being a Christian? At the heart of it, it shouldn't be that complicated. You believe in God. You trust him. You live your life the way he wants us to. And you weather the storms that life brings. Simple, right? But it never feels that way. It turns out to be way more complicated and difficult than it feels like it needs to be.

We're currently in the middle of a series going through the entire gospel of John called *Signs of Life*. We began last September and we'll wrap this up in June. Everywhere in this book we've been seeing Jesus portrayed as the source of life. During this season of Lent, we're looking at what is called the Upper Room Discourse. That's John 13-17.

Last week, we looked at the beginning of the Upper Room Discourse, where Jesus reverses everyone's expectations by washing the feet of the disciples. Then Jesus said that he wanted the disciples to follow his example.

Today we're looking at John 13:31–14:14. In this passage, Jesus makes that instruction explicit. He tells his disciples exactly what he wants from them. Exactly what it looks like to follow his example. It turns out not to be all that complicated. It's quite simple: love. Jesus commands a **simple love**.

But it doesn't stay simple. After Jesus gives his command, we hear of a conversation in which three of his disciples respond to his request. Not one of them really gets it. Each of them makes it more complicated than it needs to be. They are selective about what they hear. They are rigid about knowing what's going to happen. And they remain unconvinced even when Jesus has shown them so much. They are selective, rigid, and unconvinced.

What's great about these responses is that they miss the point in the same ways that we often miss the point. Their reaction helps us to recognize those ways that we can tend to make following Christ more complicated. Hopefully, they can help us to avoid some of their mistakes. And in the end, we will see what Jesus can do with a group of disciples that are selective, rigid, and unconvinced.

Jesus' Instruction

Our passage begins with Jesus' instruction. The last supper is over. Judas has left the room, on his way to betray his Lord. Jesus begins to speak.

John 13:31-35:

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' ³⁴A new commandment I

give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

³⁵By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The beginning of this passage is incredible. Jesus has just watched one of his disciples walk out of the room on his way to betray him and his response is “*now is the son of Man glorified.*” This is the great reversal of Jesus—the upside-down way that God works. The greatest glory of Jesus has happened when a close friend betrays him. Only in God’s kingdom does betrayal lead to glory.

In light of the way that kingdom works, Jesus gives his disciples a very simple set of instructions. Essentially, he says three things. I’m leaving. Love each other while I’m gone. Your love reveals me in my absence. It’s not complicated. I’m leaving. Love each other. That love will mark you as my disciples.

Two statements and an instruction. The instruction is simple: “*Love one another just as I have loved you.*”

I’m a huge fan of those AT&T commercials where a man interviews a bunch of kids and asks them simple questions. I like the one where the interviewer asks whether bigger is better or worse. The kids all say better. So he asks them for the biggest number they can think of. The first kid says “a trillion-billion-zillion.” The next kid says “10.” I’m not sure he understood the question. Eventually, the kids figure out that bigger really is better. Then AT&T’s tagline runs: “it’s not complicated.”

That’s true about Jesus’ statement. It’s not complicated. Love one another just as I have loved you. But somehow Peter, Thomas and Philip manage to make it complicated. Let’s see how they respond and figure out if we can learn from their mistakes.

Peter is selective

As if often the case, Peter is the first one to respond to Jesus. He jumps right in. Here is Peter’s conversation with Jesus.

John 13:36-38:

Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.” ³⁷Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸Jesus answered, “Will you lay

down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

Peter starts out by asking Jesus where he is going. It may sound like an innocent question, but it isn’t. Peter is being annoying here. If you tell your friend, “I need to go do something and then I’ll be right back” and she says, “What are you going to do?” that’s annoying. That’s what Peter is doing. He wants more than Jesus is giving him.

So Jesus answers Peter the way you might answer your friend: “You don’t need to know where I’m going. You can’t come, so don’t worry about.” Jesus is nice enough to add that Peter will eventually get to go too, but not right now. We’ll hear more about that later in this passage.

But Peter still isn’t happy. He wants to go with Jesus wherever Jesus goes. He says that he’ll follow him anywhere. He’ll even lay down his life for Jesus. That tips the scales. Until now, Jesus has been patient with Peter, but now he turns and challenges him. He questions whether Peter really will lay down his life for Jesus. And he makes a chilling prediction. Not only will Peter fail to lay down his life, but he will deny Jesus three times before morning comes.

Wow. What must that have been like to hear? You’re all fired up about being the best disciple you can be and following Jesus to the end of the earth and then he tells you that you aren’t even going to last through the night. That’s sobering.

Last week we saw how Peter wanted to go “all the way.” He wanted to be extreme. To be the best and the most faithful. We see that again this week, but now we see where that falls short. Peter wants to go all the way. But he wants to go all the way in the direction that he wants to go. He wants to be extreme as long as that looks a certain way.

Peter says “I’ll do anything you ask me to do as long as it’s going with you.” That’s why he asks “Where are you going?” He is selective about how he is willing to follow Jesus.

This can be pretty common in all sorts of relationships. Maybe a husband is willing to work crazy hours to love his family, but not willing to sit down at dinner with them. Maybe a wife is willing to wash dishes every night without fail but not sit down and listen to her husband. Maybe a friend is willing to spend all sorts of time with you but not willing to defend you when others criticize you. Maybe a boyfriend is willing to spend a lot of money but not protect your sexual relationship.

The same thing happens to us in the way that we follow Jesus—the way that we live our life as Christians. The instruction is surprisingly simple, but we find ways to do the things that are easy for us and never touch the other things. Some of us will give money to the church gladly, but won't even consider teaching children. Some of us will build houses until our fingers bleed, but talking to other people about God isn't a remote possibility. Some of us will lead a Bible study and give our time and talk about Jesus, but there's no way we're going to forgive the person who wronged me over and over again.

The challenge for us is to be willing to do whatever God asks us to do. Don't be selective like Peter.

Jesus ends up calling Peter's bluff. He calls Peter out. He tells him that he isn't as willing as he thinks he is. Peter would have taken the sharp edge of a sword for Jesus, but not the sharp comment of a servant girl. He would die alongside Jesus in a glorious fight, but not live alongside Jesus in his moment of humiliation. Peter will go all the way, but only in one direction.

What about us? Is God asking you to do something and you are ignoring him because you'd much rather do something else? Are you being selective in the areas that you're willing to follow God? Are you willing to do what Jesus asks or only things you're comfortable with?

Jesus gave a simple instruction. Peter made it complicated by being selective about what he was willing and unwilling to do.

Thomas is rigid

After Jesus has his conversation with Peter, he addresses some of Peter's concerns. He notices that Peter was discouraged that Jesus was leaving. So he tries to encourage his disciples by telling them not to be concerned. He emphasizes the fact that he is leaving, but that he will bring those who believe in him to be with him. Peter has gone silent now. This time it's Thomas who responds. Listen to Jesus' words and Thomas' response.

John 14:1-6:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him,

“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is trying to comfort his disciples. He tells them that he has to go away, but that it has a purpose. He's leaving for now so they can be together in a better way for all of eternity.

The average ancient home would not have had many rooms. Most families would have lived in a single room house that might have had a second floor where people slept. But a house with many rooms would only be a reality for a very wealthy family. No one would have been able to imagine a house with so many rooms that all the disciples could fit into it. A place for everyone. Imagine how the disciples would have heard that: there will be a place for you. Jesus is leaving so that he can get that place ready and bring his disciples there.

This is what emigrants have done throughout history. Perhaps some of you experienced this. Or perhaps some of your parents. One person, usually the father, would leave the home country and travel somewhere where there were more opportunities. He would get a job, and work hard to make enough money so that the rest of the family could eventually join him. All of his effort during that period of separation would be toward a singular goal: reunifying with his family. Building a place where his family could live comfortably. Preparing a place for them.

This is what Jesus tells his disciples that he is doing. Yes, he is going away, but he is doing so in order that he may bring them along. He is going to prepare a place for them. So he tells them, “*You know the way to where I am going.*” But this is where Thomas gets tripped up. This is where Thomas has rigid expectations.

Thomas wants specifics. He wants a roadmap. Thomas isn't a guy that likes ambiguity. We saw a hint of that tendency earlier in John's gospel. It will show up again after Jesus' resurrection when Thomas insists on seeing Jesus for himself to know that he is alive.

Thomas wants everything spelled out in advance. He wants to know how things will turn out. He wants to see it for himself. He wants all the details. Thomas asks “*how can we know the way?*” because he is being rigid about knowing how everything is going to end up.

So Jesus tells Thomas, “*I am the way.*” This is one of the famous “I am” passages in the gospel of John. Jesus is saying something powerful about who he is. He is saying

that he is the path. He is the leader and all we need to do is follow him where he goes. It's that simple.

But Thomas doesn't want a leader. He wants a map. He wants everything spelled out in advance. He's not content with simply following directions.

How many of you have GPS navigation on your phone or in your car? A lot of us these days. How many of use it pretty regularly? How many of you use it in cases when you don't really need to use it? How many of you have noticed your ability to navigate by yourself steadily getting worse? Our phones are getting smarter, but we're getting dumber in the process.

Always using a GPS to get places isn't a great habit. You don't learn the area. You don't learn how roads connect. There are several places that I go somewhat regularly that I can only get to if I follow my GPS because that's the way I've always done it and I have never actually understood where I'm going. As drivers, we need to understand where we're going, not just how to get there.

But it turns out that a bad driving habit is a great spiritual habit. Thomas wants to navigate his spiritual life like I'm telling you we should be able to navigate around the Bay Area. He wants to know where everything is, what it takes to get everywhere and feel confident about how everything is going to turn out in the end.

But Jesus says I'm sorry. I'm not giving you a map. I'm offering to lead you there. I will be your GPS, but I won't give you a map. I am the way. Jesus, himself, is the way. He is the way to get there.

Jesus says, "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*" That's a completely different way of looking at the world than we're used to. We don't tend to identify any of those words with a person. In all of those areas, we want details. We tend to be rigid just like Thomas about being able to understand everything.

We're used to knowing the way forward. Take these classes to graduate. Perform well in this way to get promoted. Act this way and people will like you.

We're used to ideas being the truth. We think that our doctrine is the truth. We think that our theology is the truth. We spell it all out: this statement is true and that statement is false.

We're used to experiences giving us life. We think that if we have a good job we'll have life. If our kids are good we'll have life. If our parents give us freedom, if we get

good grades, if we have enough friends. Life is about our experiences and our performance.

Jesus takes each of these and offers himself as the answer. He is the way forward. Simply follow him. He is the truth. Believe in him. He is the life. Live in him and you will experience what you want out of life.

Following Jesus is not about having all the answers or knowing what's going to happen or making sure that life looks the way you want it to look. It's way simpler than that. And way harder. Simple isn't easy. But it's simple. Because of that, it can be way more exciting.

When you follow Jesus, you never know what is around the next corner. Sometimes he asks us to do things we never would have thought we'd end up doing. Things no one would expect. Things that aren't in the script of the good Christian life. Jesus is unpredictable. He ad-libs. Our calling is simply to follow wherever he leads.

If you're like Thomas that is a terrifying thought. You want to know all the details. You want to know where you're going to be in ten years, in twenty years, or even next week. But Jesus doesn't always give you that information. Jesus leads us. He doesn't give us a map.

Are you rigid like Thomas? Or are you willing to follow Jesus wherever and whenever he leads?

Philip is unconvinced

We've seen Peter being selective about the parts of following Jesus that he is willing to take part in. We've seen Thomas be rigid about the details of what it will look like to follow Jesus. There's one more individual that shows up in our passage this morning: Philip.

When we first saw the disciples invited to follow Jesus, Philip received the shortest invitation. Jesus simply said, "Follow me." So Philip did. When Jesus was about to feed the five thousand on the hillside, he asked Philip to feed them and Philip's question was very practical, "*Where can we buy enough bread for all these people?*" Philip is to the point. He is a practical guy. So at the end of this passage, we see Philip wanting something concrete and practical. He wants proof. He wants to be convinced.

John 14:7-11:

If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

Philip wants to know for sure. He wants proof. “*Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.*”

I can relate to Philip. I feel this way at times. I had a conversation a few days ago where someone asked me if I ever doubted that God existed. My answer was an immediate yes. For me, doubt is an ever-present part of my faith. It’s what drives me to dependence on God and what makes faith risky. I wish there were something God could do, some sign he could give that would be, as Philip put it, “*enough for us.*” I’d love for God to give me, once and for all, an obvious sign of his reality and power and love.

Do you ever feel that way? Being a Christian is simple, except that we live in a world where we are told that we’re stupid to believe. Where science has supposedly disproved the existence of God and the stories of the Bible. We are surrounded by messages overt and subtle that faith is a fake. God isn’t real.

Philip says, “*Show us the Father, and it is enough.*” Couldn’t there be just one big sign that makes it clear that you’re really there, God. Why do you have to be so hidden? Why do you have to be so hard to spot? Philip asks to see the father because he is still unconvinced.

The other day I was meeting someone for lunch at a restaurant. I got there early, so I sat down at a table outside and waited. The time came that we were supposed to be meeting and I didn’t see the people I was meeting. It got to be 5 minutes later and then 10 minutes later. I wasn’t sure if I was being stood up. I was about to call them or text them and try to find out what happened. But I thought, “Maybe I should look around to make sure they aren’t already here.” Sure enough, they were waiting for me, inside the restaurant wondering if I’d forgotten or stood them up.

I think this is why Jesus responded the way he did. Philip is waiting for someone who is already there. He is looking for something that has already happened. He’s asking for

something that he’s already been given.

I suspect that a lot of us feel this way on any number of subjects. It’s the “just one more” attitude. Maybe we don’t feel loved by our spouse and we think that if our spouse did just one more thing to show their love, then we’d feel OK about ourselves. Maybe we’re not sure of our academic ability and we think that if we get just one more “A”, then we’ll feel OK. Maybe we feel like if we get just one more raise, then we’ll have enough money. Just one more car. Just one more kiss. Just one more dollar. Just one more and as Philip said, “*it will be enough for us.*” For me, it’s usually “just one more bowl of ice cream.” Then I’ll be satisfied.

I’m pretty sure that in my moments of doubt, I’ve thought: *if I could just walk with Jesus, then I’d have no trouble believing. Then all my doubts would be gone.* But Jesus challenges Philip and reminds him of everything that he has already seen. But here’s Philip who has walked with Jesus for three years and yet he still asks, “show us the Father and it will be enough.” Philip has seen the sick healed, the hungry fed, and the dead raised.

This is how Jesus answers him. How can you ask me for this after everything that you’ve seen? Aren’t you convinced by the things that you’ve already seen? How can you ask for more?

What about us? Are we unconvinced like Philip? Do we really have the audacity to ask God for one more sign to prove his reality and power? Isn’t raising a man from the dead enough? Didn’t that tell us all we need to know?

Jesus tells Philip to believe based on his words or based on the works themselves. The same options are open to us. Believe because of these words that confront us this morning. Believe based on the Bible and the power of the revelation of God. Or believe because of what you’ve seen God do in your life. Believe based on the works. It doesn’t matter what it takes for you to believe, but know this: you have been given enough to believe. You don’t need just one more. You don’t need anything. You’ve been given the words. You’ve been given the signs.

No matter what our world tells us, God has not hidden himself. He has revealed himself. He has given us words that speak of them. He has acted in history and we have stories that testify to that. We don’t need any more. The ball is in our court. Are we unconvinced like Philip? Or will we believe based on what God has shown us?

Conclusion

We started out this morning by thinking about how

simple tasks can often become so much harder than they need to be. Even basic instructions can be very difficult to follow.

We've heard Jesus give his disciples some simple instructions. He is leaving. They are supposed to love each other while he's gone. That love is the unique mark that identifies them as his followers.

But as the conversation unfolded, we've seen how three of the disciples respond to those instructions. Peter is selective. He wants to be radical, but only in the ways that he is comfortable with. Thomas is rigid. He wants a roadmap that shows him how everything will turn out. He doesn't want to have to follow Jesus wherever he might lead. And Philip is unconvinced. After all that he has seen, he is asking for just one more sign. He would be able to believe if Jesus would just give him one final view of the Father.

We can learn from their mistakes. We can keep it simple. We can do what Jesus wants us to do—not be selective about our obedience. We can follow Jesus day by day without knowing what's ahead. And we can remember what we've seen of God already to bolster our faith. We're going to spend some time doing that for each other in a few minutes. We don't have to make it complicated. We can keep it simple: love others as Jesus as loved us.

We don't have to be selective, rigid, and unconvinced like these disciples. But there's one more piece of good news. Listen to the last thing Jesus says in this section.

John 14:12-14:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

This last part of the passage is completely future tense. Jesus is speaking here of what will happen after he has left. And what he says is incredible. He says that his followers will do the same kinds of works that he has done. Not only that, they will do greater works. Those who believe in Jesus will do greater works than he did in the first place.

Take that in for moment. We've just seen Peter being told he will betray Jesus. We've seen Thomas get confused

about what it means to follow Jesus. And we've seen how fragile Philip's faith is.

Jesus tells these guys that they will do greater works than he ever did. And he was right. These guys built the church. They started a movement that has lasted for two millennia that has proven to be the single largest instrument of social change in the history of mankind. This movement has been the presence of God on earth. It has been the intersection of the visible and the invisible.

The church is not without its flaws. The church has terrible flaws. Ugly, disturbing, faith-questioning flaws. But still it has carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. Flawed men and women who are selective, rigid, unconvinced and who have a host of other problems. People like this have done the works that Jesus did and even greater works than those.

Being a Christian is hard. It's difficult and complicated and confusing and tiring. It seems like it should be simple, but it's often not. We make it much harder than it needs to be.

But maybe it actually is simple. Not because we make it simple but because God can work through us. God takes our flawed efforts and does something greater than what Jesus did. In the midst of our weak and confused and selective faith, he will do great things through us. And that, above all, is how as Jesus said, “the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.”