

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, September 20, 2026
9:30 AM

Text: John 14:8-14 (NRSVUE)

Theme: Love One Another: Show Us

[prayer]

Today we continue our series on Jesus's Farewell Discourse and his command to love one another.

Our call to worship included this phrase: *We are called to give in the ways we can, treating each other as neighbors, not "others."* What does it mean to treat someone as "other" instead of a neighbor?

Othering is when one category of people perceives another category of people as inferior. They do this with a particular goal in mind: To justify exclusion, injustice, and oppression. Othering encompasses all forms of prejudice – racism, misogyny, nationalism, antisemitism, etc. Othering is not just what we think or feel about each other; it is also a set of practices and policies that create group-based exclusion. The group that is othered is discriminated against, while the group that is doing the othering forms a sense of identity around the act of discrimination: "We know who we are, because we are not like *them*."

Jesus once told a parable about othering:

"Two people went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself with these words, 'God, I thank you that I'm not like everyone else—crooks, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, 'God, show mercy to me, a sinner.' I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. All who lift

themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.” (Luke 18:10-14 CEB)

Othering is frequently used by the powerful to maintain their power. Stoking anxiety, resentment, and fear of the other is an old political strategy that creates the sense of shared values, beliefs, and practices within the in-group while rooting difficulties and challenges in the dangerous “other.”

The opposite of othering is neighboring. Neighboring centers the Greatest Commandment: Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as you love yourself (cf. Matt 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:27). Neighboring focuses on building relationships, caring for the vulnerable, and working to heal divisions and conflict. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus told a story about neighboring: The Samaritan, whose people were “othered” by the Jews, crosses the road to help a Jew who was attacked and left for dead (Luke 10:25-37). Theologian Henri Nouwen wrote,

“We become neighbors when we are willing to cross the road for one another...[We have] a lot of road crossing to do. We are all very busy in our own circles. We have our own people to go to and our own affairs to take care of. But if we could cross the road once in a while and pay attention to what is happening on the other side, we might indeed become neighbors.”

The context for the Last Supper is a context of othering versus neighboring. Jesus is about to leave this small group of disciples, and they will carry on his mission in a world that is hostile to their beliefs. For the first couple centuries of its existence, the Church was a religious minority othered by pagans and Jews alike. Judaism was originally the disciples’ religious home but after the ascension of Jesus, they were forced to find a new religious home. Jesus is preparing his followers for future persecution by reminding them that their home is with him, just as his home is with the Father.

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (v. 10). Jesus wants the disciples to understand that he is the incarnate Word of God – he dwells in God and God dwells in him. After he ascends to the Father, this indwelling relationship will encompass the disciples and all the believers who

follow them. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we all now dwell in the presence of God and God dwells in the presence of us.

Jesus's words to his disciples in John 14 are about this eternal, sacred communion. Jesus is preparing his disciples for the new way of living that they will embody after he ascends to the Father:

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (vv. 6-7).

Jesus's incarnational relationship with the Father has made God's love known in a tangible way. This love is not simply spiritual; it is physical, material. That is why, when Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus shakes his head and gently chides,

"Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father...The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves" (vv. 9-11).

Jesus is the embodiment of the Father's words. As the Word of God, he has put flesh on the words of God. Those words are not just words on a page – they are walking, talking, breathing. They are preaching and teaching and healing. They are breaking bread and flipping tables. They are hanging on a cross and rising from the grave.

And now Jesus is calling his disciples to continue that work of embodiment, to show the world who the Father is by the way they live and love.

The incarnation – the belief that through Jesus we see and experience God in a way that God was not seen and experienced before – is at the very heart of the Gospel. And for the early church, gathered around their tables of fellowship just like at the Last Supper, the incarnation was much more than a theological confession. That confession, that belief, came with a cost. For a time, it put them in conflict with their pagan and Jewish neighbors. But it also informed how they

treated those neighbors. Rather than separate themselves or take up arms, they spread tables in the presence of their enemies and invited them to the feast.

Today, Christians are no longer a religious minority, at least in this country. We are now the people with immense cultural and political power. And we have committed the sin of engaging in othering for the sake of preserving that power. We forget our roots. We forget that we were once among the last and the least. We forget that the table Jesus set was a table that welcomed sinners and outcasts. We forget that in the early church, women and slaves and the poor flocked to this table because it was the one place in society where they were treated equal: “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these” (John 14:12). We scoff because how could we possibly do greater things than Jesus did? But when Jesus ascended to the Father, his work was complete while our work was just beginning: The work of glorifying God by continuing the mission that Jesus began.

Loving one another is a bold and embodied act. We can speak in the tongues of angels, but if we do not *show* love, then our words are like clanging cymbals (cf. 1 Cor 13). Jesus has empowered us to do this work; even more, he *trusts* us to do this work. I can barely wrap my mind around that: He trusts *us* to multiply his love through our own acts of loving kindness and service – bending to wash the feet of our enemies, breaking bread with the people we would prefer to other. Whenever we choose love over hatred, whenever we choose connection over isolation, we are adding to the works of Jesus so that they indeed become greater than when they began. What an honor, what a privilege, to call ourselves disciples and continue this sacred work of transforming the world through God’s love.

When you come to this table today, I invite you to consider:

What bold work of love is God trusting you with this week? Who are you treating as an other that Jesus is calling you to love like a neighbor?

Let us pray...