

**15<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

**Disciple: Love God and love others**

### **Intro**

- Morning everyone! Isn't it great to be able to gather today.
- Yesterday, we went on a steam train journey on the Severn Valley railway for my Dad's birthday. Has anyone been on that before? It's very exciting, the views are lovely and the experience on the journey was really special. We enjoyed just sitting and spectating.
- For 2 and a half years now, we have been on this journey as a church family of wanting to truly make disciples who make disciples- people who walk with Jesus and encourage others to walk with Jesus.
- Not just a journey of spectating but actually being part of and contributing.
- Home Church has been an important expression of this.
- It's amazing to hear about Home Churches providing for one another's needs, baptizing people, meeting in cafes and growing in number. But the journey hasn't always been easy, there are challenges too along the way. Despite that, we truly believe that we are glad that God has called us on this journey.
- The reason for this journey was that we felt God saying that the church had become about consumers, and we needed to be intentional in raising disciples, not just focusing on the once a week, Sunday platform-orientated space.
- It's nothing new, and so we went back to the early church to see how they did it, and Acts 2 has become foundational for us.
- You will remember a couple of weeks ago that Josh shared the church circle with us, and here is the slide as a reminder-
- In Acts 2, the early church devoted themselves to one another and to teaching, the breaking of bread and prayer, there were signs and wonders, all the believers were together and shared what they had, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

- This is a pretty radical way of living. A community of believers gathered around the worship of Jesus and loving each other, even selling possessions to give to others.
- If I'm honest, I read how the early disciples lived, I see the journey they went on and I am challenged in several ways.
- I am challenged for 2 reasons:
  - 1) I have been hurt by Christian community and haven't always felt that kind of love.
  - 2) I know I haven't loved others and been there for them in the ways I could have.
- I wonder if any of you can relate to this?

Today, my message is really simple.

***'Disciples are committed to loving God and loving those around them.'***

On this journey of loving God and not just spectating, it is supposed to impact the people around us, in a positive way. There must be fruit, evidence in our lives that we love God. Otherwise, our faith carries no weight and has no significance for anyone around us.

What is the evidence in your life that you love God?

In our house, Josh is a keen gardener, and I am a keen tidier. I can't relax if the house is messy or dirty, and I can always tell when Josh has been in the garden- there is often a trail of grass from the door, small flecks of mud on the floor and random seeds or vegetables left on the table!

Just like the evidence of Josh's passion for gardening, there should be evidence of our passion for Jesus. There should be a trail of love and kindness that we leave behind in our conversations and relationships.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus says, *'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.'*

As we have been loved first by Jesus, so we are to love others. That is how the world will know that we are Jesus' disciples.

I love a good coffee, and there is a cafe I go to very often. I probably went there every day on maternity leave. Josh used to joke with me that I was meant to support local businesses, not prop them up! There is something about the café and the manner of the staff that drew me back there. The welcome, the kindness and the generosity there I believe is evidence of the Christian manager's love for God, in how she makes her customers feel.

There are places we go and people we meet where we can experience God's love.

Today I want to reinforce the fact that our love for God has to look like something- to be manifested in our love for others, not just in our words but through our actions.

If we want to know how to love others, we have to look at how Jesus has loved us because Jesus shows us what love is.

Philippians 2: says:

'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

*<sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature<sup>[a]</sup> God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own  
advantage;*

*<sup>7</sup>rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature<sup>[b]</sup> of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.*

*<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!*

Jesus:

1- humbled himself. Philippians 2:6

2- Became like a servant. Philippians 2

3- Sacrificed himself. Philippians 2:8

4- Was obedient to the Father (Philippians 2:8).

Love looks like humility, servanthood, sacrifice and obedience.

This might seem impossible for us but I truly believe that when we know that God loves us like this, it should make us want to love others this way too.

Jesus died and rose again because he loves us.

He did it so that we could have abundant life.

He did it so that we could receive forgiveness for our sins.

He did so that we could be reconciled with God the Father.

This is love that looks like something.

Jesus is the God who enters into our suffering with us. He enters into our world, and the Bible tells us that it is because God so **loves** us that He gave his one and only son.

Love is costly. Love is sacrifice. Love is Jesus.

*"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:10*

NT Wright, a theologian, says, *'The cross is the surest, truest and deepest window on the very heart and character of the living and loving God.'*

Being a disciple means looking at the cross, seeing how much God loves us and out of that love, obeying him and loving others.

### **Testimony**

Josh and I have just walked through the hardest season of our lives. Many of you know, others might not, but after Caleb was born I really struggled and was diagnosed with post natal depression and anxiety.

I believed that I couldn't be Caleb's Mum because I just wasn't good enough. And then about a year ago I went with Caleb to stay in a mother and baby unit.

In the unit was a lounge with a craft table, and I'm not very artistic but I drew out Matthew 11:28 where Jesus says, *'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'* I stuck it up in my room as a promise that I could see every day, because I didn't feel it.

I didn't *feel* God's love but I *knew* he loved me still and I knew I had to stand on His Word. Sometimes we don't feel it, sometimes we do and it's amazing, but sometimes we have to do what the Bible says, and know and rely on the love that God has for us (1 John 4:16).

Our faith is not based on feelings. It is based on a God who demonstrated his great love for us 2,000 years ago, when he gave up his life on a cross.

God's love is something we can *know* in every season.

And amongst this all, God put people in our life, for different seasons, to help in the struggle and to show love.

Someone from our Home Church would come to our house to help me get Caleb to sleep, she would bring me a sandwich and leave things in the fridge. Another lady drove over from Telford several times. She bought us a swing seat to help get Caleb to sleep in, and she showed us a routine to try. Another friend built a ramp out of our front door so that I could get out with Caleb in the pram.

When I was in the mother and baby unit, a friend got the train up from London to see me, a lady from church drove over a couple of times, my family came. Josh came every day.

Another lady who I didn't really know cooked Josh food for when he got home late after visiting us in hospital, she made us cakes and when I came home she texted me every week to ask how I was and to pray.

I share this to say that in our hardest season, what mattered was knowing God's love for us and being loved by others.

If I am really honest, we've also had to process some hurt and disappointment. But we haven't given up on God, and we haven't given up on Christian community.

Jesus says the greatest commandment is to love God and then to love others (Matthew 22:37-39).

Loving God looks like something. It looks like holding onto Him and His words even when we don't feel it. It looks like turning up for people. Being there to celebrate with them but also to listen, to empathise, to grieve with them.

Loving God and then loving others looks like making a shepherd's pie for someone, giving them a lift, regularly and consistently checking in for them.

Loving God and loving others looks like praying for them and sharing Jesus so that they can know Him for themselves.

When we know God's love for us, when we have the revelation of how much he gave up for us, we have a compassion to give to others and to share it too.

## **Application**

### **1) Turn up for just one.**

The star fish story- I am sure you have all heard this before.

*Once upon a time, there was an old man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning before he began his work. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see, stretching in both directions.*

*Off in the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out, "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"*

*The young boy paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves," the youth replied. "When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water."*

*The old man replied, "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't really be able to make much of a difference."*

*The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, "It made a difference to that one!"*

You can't reach the whole world, but you can reach the one, right where you are.

If we here/online each committed to loving, to showing up for just 1 person, that's 2/300 people who would be reached.

One of the ladies I mentioned earlier made me feel like the 'one'. She made me feel seen. In fact, I believe her prayers led to a breakthrough in Caleb's sleeping!

Since I have recovered, there are several women that I feel God has brought around me to get to know and support. I have tried to be intentional in turning up for them.

As I am talking now, I think for some of you there will be someone who has popped into your head straight away. Contact them today. Make them a cake and drop it off. Invite them for a coffee this week. But once you've done that, don't forget about them. Check in, be consistent.

## **2) Love God by obeying Him.**

In Philippians 2, Jesus obeyed the Father even in the hardest season.

Jesus says, 'if you love me obey my commands (John 14:5).'

I think the word 'obey' can have quite negative connotations.

We obey because we love God not because we have to, not because he is a dictator, but because in obeying we get to see and experience his heart for us.

As a parent, we want Caleb to obey us not because we know what is best for him. We don't want him to get hurt or do anything that isn't healthy.

Our Heavenly Father knows what is best for us and asks us to obey Him out of love and also so that we can experience the healthiest life He has for us.

In the best season of our lives or in the worst, we can still love God by obeying him.

Continue obeying His commands today, wherever you are or whatever is happening on your journey.

## **3) Turn to Jesus.**

He died for you.

I think there might be some people here today who are struggling to believe that you are loved.

I want to tell you that you are.

You are seen, you are known, you matter. Even if you don't feel like it.

We don't see wind but we see the effects of it. Things falling over, being blown about, our hair being blown everywhere! We don't see God's love but we see the effects of it throughout history and in people's lives.

Jesus can be the rock on which we build our lives, so even when we go through the stormiest, hardest, most lonely seasons, we can have an anchor.

He doesn't love us one day and not the next- He is the same yesterday, today and forever, and He never changes (Hebrews 13:8).

I would love to pray now for anyone who doesn't yet know God's love for them.