



LOVE BOLDLY - COMMITMENT

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... we've been playing around with a hypothetical situation in a sandwich shop, so... what's your favorite sandwich shop? Do you go the café route, with a Panera or McAllister's stop? Or are you a sub aficionado, rockin' the Jimmy John's or Jersey Mike's? Ready, go!

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Creator, help us to see the value in every human, and develop compassion for all those we are called to love.

INTRODUCTION

Your panini is long since gone and your coffee cup is almost empty. But with a new vision statement for what it means to be a follower of Christ, complete with three characteristics of a disciple, (to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously,) you're feeling fairly

accomplished. You've even jotted some notes on the first one, *to love boldly*... primarily that Jesus's call to love others wasn't as easy a command as it first appeared. Jesus loved in such a radical way that the world took notice. And he showed this first and foremost through the incredible sacrifice he made and thus calls us to, as well. Feeling satisfied, you sit back in your chair, take a deep breath, and, for the first time, take a look around the sandwich shop. You slow down and really look at the people in the room. Another thought about Jesus's bold love begins to creep into your mind... each one of these people is loved by him just as much as you are. Each one has a story. Each one has brokenness that could lead them to Christ. Each one is a beloved child of God. You put pen to paper again, describing how to put this into practice. It's a crazy notion, but, if every human saw every other human this way... that would truly transform the world.

Setup Question: You've been sitting with the command to "love boldly" for a few weeks now. How has it affected your approach to life? Have you been more aware of those around you? Have you been putting bold love into practice? Share an example if you have one.

SETUP

Let's review! We began this series by introducing the new vision statement given to us by the United Methodist Council of Bishops:

**The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who,
empowered by the Holy Spirit,**

LOVE BOLDLY, SERVE JOYFULLY AND LEAD COURAGEOUSLY in local communities and worldwide connections.

We're spending our first three weeks on that first characteristic, to *love boldly*. Jesus began with love and so do we. Everything else stems from this command. Loving others, on the face of it, might seem easy. You might initially think "sure, I can be nice. I can say 'yes' when the person at DQ asks me if I'd like to round up to support that charity I've never heard of. That's *loving others*, right?" Well, yeah, keep doing that. But our Bishops (and Jesus) just had to go and add that second word, "boldly." Jesus didn't just call us to love, he called us to love *boldly*. And that's when this gets difficult. Loving boldly requires so much more than being nice and doing nice things. And last week, we began that discussion. When Jesus gave this command in John's gospel, (15:11,) he immediately qualifies it with verse 13, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." (NLT) He was saying, "be nice, be good, that's great. But the kind of radical love to which I am calling you is more than just being polite. It requires such a selfless approach that it will cost you something, up to, and maybe even including, your life." So, part 1 for *loving boldly* requires sacrifice.

Question 1: How did you do enacting this facet of bold love this past week? Did you get the opportunity to sacrifice for your loved ones? How about for someone other than your immediate circle? Did someone sacrifice for you?

SCRIPTURE

Last week, we looked at Jesus's command to love others as it is recorded in John's version of his life. But this isn't the only place in the Bible we find this command. In the other three books about Jesus, what we call the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, talk about it in a different context. And it's from Luke's telling of an interesting encounter between Jesus and an expert in the Hebrew Law that will give us our next tip for *loving boldly*.

Read Luke, chapter 10, verses 25 through 28.

Again, pretty straight forward: *love God* and *love others*. The Expert in the Law is probably feeling pretty good about himself. But what happens next proves how revolutionary Jesus's brand of bold love is.

Read verses 29 through 37.

In John's gospel, Jesus expounds on his command to love others by talking about sacrifice. Here in Luke's gospel, Jesus again expounds on his command to love others, but focusing on a different aspect... just how far we are to go to show others his love.

Question 2: If you've been around this church thing for a while, you've probably heard this story before. Is there anything that strikes you about this passage? How would you have felt if you were in Jesus's presence hearing this story? Is it convicting? Does it feel unachievable?

REFLECTION

Jesus highlights another aspect of what it means to love boldly here. See, the Samaritan could have stopped to help and just done the bare minimum. He could have made sure the guy was okay, bandaged his wounds, and left. He might have even taken him to the nearest Jewish home, made sure they would take care of him, and then been on his way. Even that much would have been more than the priest or the Temple assistant did, and Jesus still would have had a story. But to reach the kind of bold love Jesus is calling his followers to, he makes an extreme point. It's not enough just to do more than the guy before you. It's not even enough to make a benevolent gesture in the moment. If you're going to offer the kind of bold love that will make the world take notice, it will first require sacrifice (like we talked about last week,) but it will also take...

COMMITMENT

The Samaritan doesn't just make sure the guy is okay... he *commits* to the man's well-being. He goes above and beyond, not just content to do more than the person before him. He knows the bar Jesus has set for what *loving others* means, and he lives up to it.

Question 3: In order to motivate us to live this out for others, it's often helpful to consider a time when someone acted this way toward us. Who has been a Samaritan in your life? Who went above

and beyond, committing to your well-being? What made it so extraordinary?

What does this level of commitment look like? Well, it sets up as a two-step process. First, there's an interesting word in verse 33 that we, in English, tend to overlook. The NLT translates it this way, "when he *saw* the man..." (NLT) But the Greek word used here isn't just the standard word used for "seeing." The Greek word has more meaning, more depth. In other places it is translated as "behold." *Behold* the lamb. *Behold*, an angel. *Behold*, the star that showed Jesus's birthplace. It meant more than just "to see." It meant "to experience," "to take in." The Samaritan *beheld* the man, beaten and left to die on the road. He sees him for who he is. He sees the innate, God-given value that every human has. Step one to the kind of commitment it takes to love boldly: seeing the worth in others.

This can be truly difficult these days. We have a tendency to separate ourselves into silos of people who look, act, and believe like us. And so, we only ever hear what confirms our already-held views on life. And anyone different is put in a different silo, lumped together as "other." But when we separate ourselves so blatantly and categorize people so generally, it can be nearly impossible to see the worth in everyone. But we know Jesus calls us to see the value in all people, even those we might despise, because he specifically uses a Samaritan and a Jewish man for this story. Samaritans and Jews did not like each other. Jews saw Samaritans as second-class citizens and Samaritans saw Jews as snobbish elitists, and that's putting it mildly.

But if a Samaritan could *behold* the God-given worth in a Jewish rival, surely we can see the same worth in someone who is on the other side of the aisle from us. You will never look into the eyes of someone who isn't a beloved child of God. Jesus's brand of love is so bold because it is so difficult. Our Bishops didn't forget this... in the description to go with this characteristic, they remind us to... *"like Jesus, embrace and include people of every age, nation, race, gender and walk of life."* How will you commit to embracing and including the children of God you are called to love?

Question 4: Though our society may not be the most divided it has ever been, (there have been times when our polarization has led to war,) we do live in a day and age where everyone's opinions are more public and our differences so apparent. How difficult is it for you to see the worth in everyone, especially those you differ with? What makes it tough?

CLOSING

In verse 33, after he "sees" the man, it says he "feels compassion" for him. When we see the God-given worth in another human being, we can't help but feel compassion for their suffering. But what does this compassion drive him to do? Well, that's the second-part of this two-step commitment process. It leads him to walk the journey *with* the Jewish man. (In the Disney ending to this story, they become friends and attend each others' kids' bar-mitzvahs.) Step two: build a relationship. We don't transform others with a strongly worded social media post. We transform each other when we build relationships

and see the worth in them, especially those with whom you disagree. That's the kind of bold love to which Jesus is calling us, a bold love that requires commitment, a bold love that requires time and energy and effort, a bold love that looks like a Samaritan caring for a Jew. Today, we close with a challenge, and it's a tough... open your eyes and truly *see* your fellow humans. See the worth in everyone, even those you disagree with, and then build a relationship... you never know whose world you might transform. Could even be your own.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**