

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Loving Jesus*
SERIES: *Knowing, Loving & Following Jesus*
SCRIPTURES: *1 John 4:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; John 21:15*
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**Credit to Alan Robinson, John Ortberg (Love Beyond Reason)*

Well good morning, it is so great to worship with you this morning.

We are in the second week of our sermon series “**Knowing, loving and following Jesus.**” (**Series Title Slide**)

And I just want to say this to clarify, if Anabaptist is a new word for you. It is ANA-baptist not Anti-baptist. Ana, is the prefix meaning re-baptized. During the Reformation in 1500’s, you’ll be familiar with names like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli. The Anabaptist tradition goes back to this time, Reformation of the church. The normal practice of the church at that time was infant baptism. The Anabapists, were those who said, we don’t see infant baptism when we read Scripture, we see adult or believers baptism, when someone makes a choice to follow Jesus. And so the Anabaptists were the group of people who had been baptized as infants and then were re-baptized as adults. They formed a community of followers, with certain characteristics and theology. And that’s where we, BIC Church, trace our roots.

You’ll learn more about some of the Anabaptist characteristics. But one of the primary characteristics is our Sermon series phrase. We understand our faith best, by looking at Jesus. And so last week we spent some time talking about knowing Jesus. That we spend a significant amount of our lives gaining all different kinds of

knowledge. But there is one kind of knowing that is central to who we are...and that is knowing Jesus.

This morning we want to look at the second part of that phrase: Loving Jesus. And I want to talk about 4 primary things that Loving Jesus means for us.

1. Loving Jesus is a response.

There's this really small, yet powerful statement that John makes in one of his letters...

1 John 4:19 – We love, because He first loved us.

Loving Jesus, flows out of Jesus. And I was thinking just how powerful a concept this is to grab hold of.

Notice this, we do not make ourselves lovable and then Jesus chooses to love us.

Often this is how it works in our world. We love things that are unique, attractive or will give us something in return. And so, we will spend our resources, our energy, our time...our lives trying to prove we are worthy of being loved.

This is why, John's little phrase is so important for us to grasp. Loving Jesus is first of all a response to Jesus who loves us. Jesus just loves us first, lavishly, extravagantly. And it has nothing to do with making ourselves worthy enough.

Did you grow up with a stuffed animal or a blankie or something like that?

When Jenny was little she received a stuffed animal from her parents. A little blue elephant. **(PIC OF JENNY'S ELEPHANT)** She named him Peanut. When she first got Peanut he was brand new, fluffy, soft, bright. He smelled fresh and clean. He

was just the kind of stuffed animal you would want to wrap your arms around hug. He was worthy of love. She cared for Peanut, she took Peanut everywhere she went and every night Peanut snuggled her as she fell asleep. Jenny loved Peanut.

Over time, Peanut slowly began to wear out. His bright blue faded, his fluffy fur became matted and rough and he no longer smelled so fresh and clean.

Peanut still exists today. Peanut lives in our house. And if you would meet Peanut today, you would kind wonder why something so tattered and worn could be so loved. There are time we've even gone through our house and gotten rid of things that are no longer worthwhile, no longer valuable. But that little blue elephant still has home because Jenny loves that little thing. Jenny first loved Peanut.

We are, all of us, kind of like Peanut. We are created in beauty, bright, and fluffy, in the image of the maker. And yet, we are all too well aware that we born into a kind of tatteredness, fallen, imperfect and worn.

And sometimes we get the idea that our tatteredness makes us unlovable. And so we spend our lives trying to prove our beauty.

The transformative truth about our faith is that Jesus first loved us. He knows all about you. He knows your story. He knows the good and the bad. He knows all the things that make lovable and all the things that make you unlovable. He knows your deep dark secrets...and He absolutely loves you.

The person who knows you most deeply, loves you most fully.

I love this passage when God talks about why he chose Israel as His people...

Deuteronomy 7:7 - ⁷ The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD loved you

God does not love us because we are unique, attractive, or we provide value to him. He loves us first and that's what makes us infinitely valuable, worthy, beautiful.

CS Lewis wrote this: **“God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous (unnecessary) creatures in order that he may love and perfect them.”**

God did not create us because He had to. He did not create us because He was bored or lonely or had nothing better to do. God did not create us because he NEEDED to. God creates us out of love.

You are here. You are lovable, you are worthy because you are the result of God's love. All of the tatteredness will never take away your value and your worth. “We love, because He first loved us...”

Second,

2. Loving Jesus is a commitment.

Too often in our world we have turned the concept of love into a feeling or an emotion. When we talk about falling in love we mean, something that happens to us, outside of our control. I remember the moment in high school when I realized that the girl I liked (Jenny), liked me back. We had classes together. And that feeling of racing heart, sweaty palms. But that is only a part of the love experience. There is a deeper love that involves my will-power...commitment.

CS Lewis talks about it like this...

The feeling of **“Being in love is a good thing, but it is not the best thing. It is a noble feeling, but it is still a feeling. ...no feeling can be relied on to last...”**

But...Love is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit;

this love (committed love), **lasts even at those moments when they do not like each other... (CS Lewis)**

Paul, writing to one of the early churches, and he writes these words...

1 Thessalonians 1:3 - ³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor of love...

He’s talking about this commitment kind of love, that you labor to achieve. You commit yourself to it. That means you worked...you chose it, even though you didn’t feel like it.

There are moments when loving Jesus seems easy, we feel like it. When I realize he forgives my sins or that he loves me even in my imperfection. When I experience the joy of generous giving (Zacchaeus). When I experience victory over a certain temptation or bad habit. When I’m really getting something out of my Bible reading or devotions. When my ministry and volunteering at Church is thriving. Just easy to love Jesus.

But there are moments in every loving relationship where you don’t feel like loving and instead you must make the cognitive, intentional choice to keep loving the other person.

I was thinking that this word LABOR, is such an appropriate word for thinking about the commitment kind of love that we must have for Jesus.

A little over 9 years ago Jenny and I went into the hospital for the birth of our first son Landon (**PIC**). But you know to hold that little baby in your arms, to experience the joy of looking into his little eyes, tickling his little belly, requires hours of labor, pain, commitment.

I actually remember sitting there feeling somewhat helpless while Jenny was in the midst of our labor of love. As a husband you never know exactly what your role is in all of this. I wanted to support and encourage Jenny, but I didn't know how. So I remember this clearly, I was sitting off to the side and the nurse, I think she thought I was just being that unhelpful husband and so she said, in a kind of snarky voice, *"Why don't you come and rub your wife's back."* I thought she of all people would have known that it's better to let the laboring mother give instructions, and so as I stood up, I said, *"Jenny would you like me to rub your back?"* And, no joke, Jenny looked up with hatred in her eyes and she said, *"Do not touch me. You're the reason I'm in this mess to begin with. I love you, but I do not like you right now."*

Yes love involves our emotions but it must move past our emotions and become a commitment. Loving Jesus is no exception. Loving Jesus requires commitment...even when you don't like it.

There are moments when I know how I want to behave, but I sense Jesus beside me telling me...that as his follower, I can't. And sometimes, in those moments. I wish he would go away or that I could ignore Him. And loving him becomes a commitment. There are moments where I begin to wonder if I will ever have victory over some temptation...and I get angry at him. Why aren't you helping me? There are moments when I don't feel like serving or volunteering or my ministry efforts seem fruitless.

There are moments when Jesus and his way of life seem to get in the way of the way I want life. (Rich young ruler). What do you mean I have to be patient? What do you mean I have to give up gluttony? What do you mean you our family needs to change our schedules around?

There are moments when life is just hammering me and I feel like Jesus walked away and left me. And it is then that love becomes commitment.

Loving Jesus flows out of his love for us. Loving Jesus is a commitment. Third...

3. Loving Jesus is a matter of priority

(Alan Robinson)

So much of loving Jesus is not about choosing between GOOD and EVIL, rather it is a matter of priority. We all have a priority list of loves. My wife. My kids. My work. My hobbies. And the question is, where is Jesus on that list?

In John 21 there is a story involving Jesus and Peter. This is after Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Peter is one of the more well-known and outspoken disciples. He is the one who walks on water. He is the one who says, “even if all of the rest of the disciples leave you, I won’t.” And he is perhaps most famous for being the one to deny Jesus three times.

And so in John 21, by the Sea of Galilee, Peter and a few of the other disciples have been out fishing all night long.

Jesus appears on the shore and invites the disciples to come and eat with him. And there is a conversation between Jesus and Peter. Where Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” But it is the way Jesus asks the very first question that is most intriguing.

John 21:15 - ¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

The Greek language is somewhat unclear, about what exactly Jesus is referring to in the passage. What “THESE” is Jesus talking about?

But one likely suggestion is that Jesus’ points to the boats and nets (**PIC OF PETER & BOATS/NETS**). Peter, do you love me more than these? Now why that question. Well, remember, Peter for many years had been a fisherman. When Jesus first met Peter, he asked Peter to leave behind the boats and nets.

Is Peter now returning to the boats and nets, after Jesus’ death?

Is Peter returning to that which is familiar to him? He made the choice to follow Jesus, to love Jesus, but now the pull to return to his old life is calling him back. It is a matter of priority.

Peter do you love me more than these?

For all of us loving Jesus is a matter of priority.

There are so many things in this world that we give our love to. There are people, activities, work, hobbies, food. And we are constantly being pulled to those things that are comfortable, familiar, profitable, easier.

I love sports. I love all sports. If you start getting to know me, it won’t take you long to discover how much I love sports. I love to play, I love to coach, I love to watch, I love to know about sports. I immerse myself when I’m watching. I will jump up and down. I can quote sports facts and information. I’ll stay up late or get up early (when the Olympics are on.) I’ll rearrange my schedule for sports. I’ll sit out in the cold or rain for sports. I’ll put up with all kinds of nonsense for sports. I’ll pay to

watch sports. Nothing wrong with sports. But they are a matter of priority. Jesus looks into Shaun's eyes and he says, "Do you love me more than these?" Will you love me more than sports. Will you immerse yourself in me? Will you read about me? Will you learn, can you quote my facts and information? Will you jump up and down for me? Will you stay up late or get up early? Will you rearrange your schedule? Would you sit out in cold and the rain? Would you pay to know me?

Do you love me more than these?

What are the THESE, in your life?

Barna research group did a study in 2015 on the most significant influences in our lives. And what they discovered was kind of eye-opening regarding Christians and our priorities.

The study showed that Christians say they would rank their priority as **God – Family – Country**

But what they actually discovered is that in the practical living of our daily lives, God (faith) was actually much less of an influence on our choices.

That in a world of competing loves, we talk the talk but we don't walk the walk.

I love my family. I would do anything for my family. I would sacrifice anything. But when values of family conflict with Jesus. I am a Jesus follower first.

Unless you hate mother and father, brother, sister...you cannot be my disciple. It's not that you should hate your family, it's a matter of priority.

Shaun, do you love me more than these?

I love so many things about my country. I am a citizen of the US. It's on my passport. Born in Zambia, Africa...but I'm an American citizen. During the Olympics, I root for the American athletes. I am most inspired in those moments when our athlete stands on the Gold Medal podium and they play the National Anthem of the United States.

But Jesus asks, "Shaun do you love me more than these?"

When the values of my country conflict with the values of the Jesus Kingdom, Jesus wins out. I am not first an American. I am not first even a Kipe. I am a follower of Jesus first. Loving Jesus is a matter of priority.

Finally,

4. Loving Jesus means loving others.

The primary form that loving Jesus takes in the Bible is loving other people.

I want to go back to the passage we started with this morning with in 1 John 4...

1 John 4:20 - ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

John presents this almost as a **litmus test**. You remember litmus test from high school science class. The results are based upon only one factor.

The litmus test of loving Jesus is loving the people around you. You cannot claim to love God if you do not love others.

John 13:35 - ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Notice, the litmus test for loving Jesus is not a prayer you said.

It's not a verse you can quote.

It's not about your church membership status.

It's loving others. That's the test.

Let me just challenge all of us for a moment with this concept. It begs the questions “who are my brothers and sisters?”

In a simple sense we could say, “We are the Five Forks Brethren in Christ Church.” Brothers and sisters would be defined as those who are part of this fellowship, this church. I'll just stop there for a second this harder for us then we think.

Loving Jesus means, loving those with a different preference in music style, volume, song selection. (Notice we don't have to agree, but we have to love, even when we disagree.)

Loving Jesus means, loving those with different political views. We are living in a time and place with so much hostility based on political views. We don't have to agree, but we have to love one another.

Whoever claims to love God, yet hates their brothers and sisters is a liar.

But, I wonder if the challenge to love others actually goes much deeper than just those of us who call Five Forks our church. It's hard, but in many ways we can see this kind of love as achievable.

There is a story in the New Testament where an expert in the law asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment and Jesus says, “Love God and Love neighbors.”

Once again you see these two things side by side. Loving Jesus, Loving others. And the expert says, “Yeah but who are my neighbors.” He’s trying to limit the scope of the people he needs to love and so Jesus proceeds to tell this story that smashes the concepts of acceptable people to love.

The story is called the **Good Samaritan**. There are so many layers to this story. But just to keep it simple, to this Jewish law expert, even the concept of a good Samaritan was contradictory. No such thing. Samaritans are outsiders, gentiles, they don’t follow any of the laws

Jesus knows this so he uses the Samaritan as the prime example of someone who compassionately loves a wounded Jewish traveler...the concept of who “brothers and sisters” are is absolutely shattered.

Jesus defines brothers and sisters as all of humanity, regardless of race, ethnicity, language, or religion. We share a common humanity, with all human beings.

“There is no longer Jew nor Greek, Slave or free, men or women.”

Jesus says, **“Whatever you do for the least of these you do for me.”**

Someone once asked Mother Theresa what she saw as she walked the streets of Calcutta where the poorest of the poor lived, what she saw when she looked at orphans, the starving, the dying. This is what she said: “I see Jesus in a distressing disguise.”

Loving Jesus means that we see every person as bearing the image of the creator...no exceptions!

Loving Jesus means loving those with different skin color.

Loving Jesus means loving those who speak different languages.

Loving Jesus means loving those who hold different religious beliefs. He loves them first. The litmus test for loving Jesus is loving others.

And I know, you're thinking...that doesn't seem realistic or practical. Surely Jesus doesn't expect that kind of love.

Paul writes in Romans 5: **“But God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were sinners Christ died for us...while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son.”**

God loves you and me in this manner. And we love, because he first loved us.

When we say that are a church loving Jesus it flows out of the realization that He love us first. We believe that it will require commitment, it is a labor of love. It's a matter of priority for us, loving Jesus ahead of all other loves.