

### ***Message: Finding Jesus***

#### **Where do you go to find Jesus?**

That’s an interesting question. If we went around the room, I’ll bet we’d hear a wide variety of places, circumstances and situations where we found Jesus or, in some cases, where Jesus came and found us. After all, Jesus always looks for that last, lost sheep.

**I’ve shared parts of my story over the past three years.** I left the church in my 20s and didn’t find my way back until the year 2000 at the age of 42. Looking back on that 20+ year period, one thing surprises me. I always knew where I could go to find Jesus. Sadly, I always managed to find reasons to ignore him. No matter what’s going on in our life, Jesus is there. Not in person, but through the love of others.

**We all know that it’s hard to hear “find Jesus” when things are going wrong in our lives.** Our scripture reading from John 13:31-35 makes that case. At the time I’ll bet no one understood why Jesus stopped to say what he did. Later on, after his followers had a chance to reflect and talk together, it became clearer. That’s why John 10-15 is called the “farewell message” of Jesus.

**To get the point Jesus is making,** we have to understand what was going on when Jesus said, *“I give you this command: love each other”* (v31). Jesus and his followers are gathered together in a second story room in Jerusalem, having a meal right before the festival of Passover. It isn’t dinner as usual. For one thing Jesus, their teacher and leader, got down on his knees and washed their feet. That’s a job usually reserved for the lowest of the household servants. Jesus is using the moment to teach them they’re to be humble, to care for each other as equals.

**Later during the meal, Jesus drops a bombshell.** He gets visibly upset and says *“one of you will betray me”* (v21). THAT gets the group going! In the middle of it all, Jesus confronts Judas, who leaves to betray him. The other disciples didn’t understand what was going on...they want to know who it will be. At this point, it’s night time. They don’t know it, but in 24 hours their world will be turned upside down. Jesus is preparing them for what will come and life afterward. He does the same for us, if we’re open to it.

**After Judas leaves, Jesus tells them that what’s going happen will give glory to God and Jesus.** He says, “*Children, I am with you for only a short time longer. You’re going to look high and low for me. But just as I told the Jews, I’m telling you: ‘Where I go, you aren’t able to come.’*” (vv31-33, MSG). Jesus is going ahead to prepare the way, working behind the scenes – in and through us.

**That’s when Jesus gives his third commandment:** “*Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other*” (John 13:35). Jesus is showing us the way to navigate when he’s not physically present. That gift was given to those who were with him that evening and all who have, do and will believe in him.

**Jesus’ command is different.** It completes and fulfills the instructions God gave to Moses. It isn’t a law in the sense of “break it and you’ll pay.” You won’t get a ticket for going slow in the love language lane. You won’t be locked out of heaven for not being loving enough to that homeless person. Falling out of love with God, ignoring our neighbors and not getting involved at church doesn’t come with a penalty.

**We’re the ones making the choice.** We can either connect to God and others or we can become isolated, separate and lonely. Solitude is not the same as isolation. Being in relationship with Jesus and with others is healthy, but messy. Not being in a relationship with Jesus isn’t healthy – mentally, emotionally, physically or spiritually. And it’s still messy!

**Jesus’ command to love each other isn’t a suggestion.** To live the way he asks requires us to be intentional. It takes dedication, work and passion. That’s what it takes to be in relationship. To be in a relationship with each other means we have to be willing to put aside our preferences and put up with each other. To be in a relationship with our neighbor means we have to be willing to go outside of our comfort zone, cross boundaries and willing to engage in real conversation with people who aren’t like us. To be in relationship with Jesus means we have to look for the places where we find Jesus and do what it takes to go there.

**Where do you go to find Jesus?** People try different things - walks on the beach, church online, reading blogs, small groups or watching TV. There’s nothing wrong with any of these activities. I enjoy them, too. I’m going to make the case for coming to church to worship. Yes, it’s important. No, it’s not a law. Yes, it will help. No, it’s not the same.

**Let me ask you a question to help you reflect and choose: Do you find your devotion to Jesus increasing in those times?**

**I’ll be honest.** When I’m away or at home during the week, I don’t always spend every morning reading the Bible or in prayer. There are times when Esperanza and I are away when missing church doesn’t seem like a big deal. I’m guessing you feel the same.

**But I feel off balance** if I miss a couple of days without praying or reading the Bible, or if I miss services for two weeks. My life seems a bit diminished. There’s something absent. God hasn’t gone away.

I have. I’m not open, listening and accepting God’s grace. My spirit isn’t connected to the source of life and goodness – Jesus!

**Do you feel that way?** Some might argue with me, but I would say that all of the other ways we occupy our time are like that. Walks on the beach or in the mountains or meeting our friends for coffee on Sunday morning are great and they make us feel good, but it isn’t the same as gathering with others who love us to worship Jesus.

**Attending church online, reading blogs, watching TV or watching Christian music, messages or sermons on YouTube can be uplifting.**

It can help us during a difficult time. But it isn’t the same thing as gathering with others who love us to connect to Jesus. And, once connected, to feel the healing, renewing energy flowing into our soul from God. When we gather, we have the chance to connect with others to share what’s going on in our life, allowing us to receive their love and care. That’s a good thing. Jesus is present.

**Small groups are an amazing way to connect and grow.** But even the best groups – those that pray, reflect on scripture, serve, share their stories and provide for the church, don’t have the same scope and impact as gathering with others to worship on Sunday.

**It isn't always easy to come to church.** Sometimes we don't feel like others care. Sometimes the music, sermon and style of worship is boring. We'd rather avoid it than deal with the mess. But God's family is messy. It always has been. Things weren't easy for Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah or any of the people of faith.

**The first thing Abraham did when he moved was to build an altar.** That's so he, Sarah and their household could worship God together. That's a good practice for us. Jesus tells us that's where we'll find his love in action.

**A mark is a sign that leads to an act.** When we're marked by Jesus' love, it's an act of grace. The sign that we've accepted the grace of Christ is the way we love. That's our mark. That's how we show we're really, truly part of a community that trusts God, believes in Jesus and is willing to show it – publically and privately.

**The way we love others is our mark.** It isn't a nametag, business card or t-shirt. It comes from the inside, from our soul, and it's expressed in the way we behave. Jesus' mark of love shapes the way we see the world and the way we live.

**Jesus left so we could be redeemed and saved.** But he didn't forget about us or leave us behind. Jesus showed us that we're better together. That's the way we find the strength and hope that will keep us going, even through betrayal, denial, anger, sadness and the dark moments of life, even death. Love has the power to lift us in an instant. It isn't selfish. It makes sacrifices to give new life.

**Where do you find Jesus?** Right here and now. I invite you to come every week and bring those you love, especially children, so we may experience Jesus' love together. That's the way to life, love and hope.

Let us pray ...

*Lord of Life, we thank you for gathering us together this day as your children. No matter what we've done or left undone, we know you forgive us because you love us. Loving Savior, we lift up to you those who we love, especially those who haven't received your loving grace. We pray for those who are persecuted for sharing your love. We lift all who are in need of your healing touch. Lord, make us your eyes, ears, hands and feet, that we may care for those whom we meet with love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

**Psalm 148 (CEB)**

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from heaven!

Praise God on the heights!

Praise God, all of you who are his messengers!

Praise God, all of you who comprise his heavenly forces!

Sun and moon, praise God!

All of you bright stars, praise God!

You highest heaven, praise God!

Do the same, you waters that are above the sky!

Let all of these praise the LORD’s name

because God gave the command and they were created!

God set them in place always and forever.

God made a law that will not be broken.

Praise the LORD from the earth,

you sea monsters and all you ocean depths!

Do the same, fire and hail, snow and smoke,

stormy wind that does what God says!

Do the same, you mountains, every single hill,

fruit trees, and every single cedar!

Do the same, you animals—wild or tame—

you creatures that creep along and you birds that fly!

Do the same, you kings of the earth and every single person,

you princes and every single ruler on earth!

Do the same, you young men—young women too!—

you who are old together with you who are young!

Let all of these praise the LORD’s name

because only God’s name is high over all.

Only God’s majesty is over earth and heaven.

God raised the strength of his people,

the praise of all his faithful ones—

that’s the Israelites,

the people who are close to him.

Praise the LORD!

**John 13:31-35 (CEB)**

When Judas was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Human One has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify the Human One in himself and will glorify him immediately. Little children, I’m with you for a little while longer. You will look for me - but, just as I told the Jewish leaders, I also tell you now - ‘Where I’m going, you can’t come.’

I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.”

***(The Message)***

When he had left, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is, and God seen for who he is in him. The moment God is seen in him, God’s glory will be on display. In glorifying him, he himself is glorified - glory all around!

Children, I am with you for only a short time longer. You are going to look high and low for me. But just as I told the Jews, I’m telling you: ‘Where I go, you are not able to come.’

Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples - when they see the love you have for each other.”