

Let us pray,

Help us to show our love to you lord. Give us the strength and the compassion to be your beloved community.

Amen.

How do we show our love to Jesus?

How do we see Jesus?

Is it by saying many prayers?

Is it by singing songs that say I love you Jesus over and over again?

Is it standing on the corner of streets telling people that they need to repent otherwise they will go to hell?

Is it making social media posts about how right or wrong we think people are?

Is it burning ourselves out trying to save other people from their problems to the point that we neglect our own needs and start to resent helping other people?

Or on the opposite end, is it secluding ourselves from the world and only worrying about me, myself and I?

Jesus says:

“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

But what are those commandments?

Well just a few chapters prior Jesus says:

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Jesus wants to create the beloved community.

He wants people who are willing to do what it takes to love one another.

He wants people who are devoted not to good deeds, just for the sake of doing good deeds.

But people who are devoted to good deeds because it means relationship, it means mutual love, it means community.

A lot of us are very good at charity.

We are very good at giving away.

But a lot of us, myself included, struggle with the relationship part.

It is not enough unfortunately, to just give something away to someone in need.

What Jesus wants from us is for us to become friends with everyone.

I know that this is easier said than done.

There will be times where we want a relationship with someone, but they may not want a relationship with us.

But what we have here at Grace is an opportunity.

We have a community that can be an example of what true community looks like.

We can show the world what mutual love is amongst God's people.

We can be people who are willing to step outside of our family units and see that family is bigger than blood.

Family is those that we decide and that God calls us to be in relationship with.

Grace is a very friendly church.

You all are doing a great job in welcoming people and being a loving and caring place.

I feel very cared for here, and I have heard similar things from others.

But how can we go one step further, how can we invite those from the outside in.

How can we be more hospitable to those who are not like us.

How can we be the example of true radical hospitality by inviting those into our community that Jesus would have gotten in trouble for calling friends.

What can we do as a community, what compromises can we make, what changes can we do to make our place of worship and fellowship, a more inclusive and welcoming place to be.

What can we do to let the world know that at least here at Grace, all are welcome.

Truly all.

Those who we disagree with, who live differently, speak differently, worship differently.

How can we be the place that embodies the love of Jesus, by loving one another, especially those whom aren't like me.

This is not easy, and I do not claim to have the answers to how we can do this.

All I can offer is the direction.

But only because Jesus was the one who gave it to us.

This isn't my call for us, this is Jesus'.

And each one of us has a part to play in this.

This ministry of loving the unknown neighbor cannot be done by a few of the beloved community.

It must be done by all of us.

The beloved community requires love from all parties to be involved.

It requires mutual sacrifice and mutual benefit.

It requires compromise.

If we truly wish to create this community that God wants us to create, most of us will be required to compromise.

But the benefit is that we are creating a community that shows God's love in the best possible way.

When we are willing to give something up so that others may feel comfortable being amongst the group, we are truly living into the life and ministry of Jesus.

Jesus gave up his life, so that we may become children of God.

And what God is asking from us, is that we as a people, be willing to give things up so that others may become friends and family in the beloved community.

And in turn, learn to also love Jesus.

The story of Jesus Christ and his love for humankind and the cosmos lives on not just through the words in the bible.

But through the actions of those who live it out.

May we learn to be flexible.

May we learn to compromise.

May we learn to love instead of hate.

May we learn to hear and understand, rather than speak and condescend.

May we learn that loving Jesus, is only possible when we learn to love our fellow humans.

Jesus is not only loved through private and personal devotion.

Jesus is not loved through self righteous legalism.

Jesus is loved by loving others, by putting down the sword, and sacrificing some of our own desires and needs, so that others may have their desires and needs met as well.

I want to be clear.

We do not need to be saviors, nor should we be.

We do not need to give up everything.

But we do need to give up something.

And when we can work together, put in the work together, carry the burden together.

We will see that this task Jesus gives us really is easier than we think.

It just requires more hands.

May we love Jesus by loving those whom Jesus loves, which of course is everyone.

Amen.