

Sermon – March 21, 2010
“Jesus – The Hated One”

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John 15:18-16:4

We continue our Lenten sermon series “Looking to Jesus” today on this 5th Sunday of Lent. We began this series affirming Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith – the one who calls us to faith and enables us to live out our faith to the end. We have seen Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life – the one who loved us sacrificially and calls us to live out that same kind of love in the world for others. We came to the Lord’s Table seeing Jesus as the bread of life that nourishes and sustains our spiritual journey. And last week we saw Jesus as the true vine, the one in whom we are called to abide so we may experience the abundant joy, the deep shalom and wholeness which only Jesus can offer to us.

Today’s passage in John brings an abrupt change in character. Jesus is once again speaking to his disciples in the Upper Room just hours before his betrayal will set in motion all the events leading to Calvary. These are his friends, his family in a very real sense, the ones who have shared daily life together over the past three years. They have experienced all that Jesus has said and done in his amazing ministry. These disciples, in spite of their humanness, have given themselves over to Jesus completely. Now, in these words, he shares with them very honestly. When we purchased our home a few weeks ago, we received a “Truth in Lending” disclosure statement clearly defining the obligations we were undertaking in our decision to buy a home.

These words of Jesus to his disciples are a “truth in discipleship” statement, clearly defining what Jesus’ disciples – and what we – are undertaking as we look to and follow Jesus as Savior and Lord. We should listen very closely.

[Read John 15:18 – 16:4]

I am glad to report it is still there – our Pittsburgh Penguins bumper sticker that is! It’s on our van which we brought from Pittsburgh where having a Penguins bumper sticker was very common. However, we knew in coming to Detroit we were entering a different situation. Credit to all here for being gracious and hospitable to us! We weren’t sure the bumper sticker would last that long. Our devotion to the Penguins in Pittsburgh united us with all the other fans in the area who shared a common passion for hockey and for this particular team. We were bound together in our affection and commitment. We were among friends. Now however, in a place where people have a passion for the Red Wings, our devotion to the Penguins may create more friction than friendship!

Jesus and the disciples have shared life together now for three intense years. The disciples have given their lives and hearts to this man from Nazareth who they love but don’t fully understand. They have heard his words and seen the miraculous things he has done. Now, in what is essentially his last will and testament to them, he reminds them of what lies ahead in their journey of discipleship. To be sure, they will receive all the blessings Jesus has spoken of to them: his peace which the world cannot give, that abundant joy which is the

fruit of abiding in Christ's love, his assurance they would continue to do the works Jesus himself had done. But he also reminds them "if they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also." (Jn. 15:20) The disciples' friendship with Jesus will inevitably cause friction with others in the future. By this time in his ministry, Jesus had ample evidence of the reality of this truth from the response to his words and his works among the Jewish people.

Jesus reminds the disciples that the words he has spoken and the works he has done have been received in different ways by different people. Many had been drawn to follow Jesus and find in him the One they had been awaiting as the anointed one of God. But many others had heard his words and seen his works and responded with hatred and animosity. When you read the record in John's gospel of what Jesus said and did you see what Jesus means. He had spoken clearly about being sent from the Father. He had used the very phrase Jews knew God had revealed to Moses as the divine name of God: "I AM the light of the world", "I AM the good shepherd", "I AM the way, the truth, and the life", "I AM the resurrection and the life". They accused him of making himself equal with God, a charge that was in fact true but beyond their willingness to consider and understand. Jesus had even castigated the religious leaders as being children of the devil for their resistance to his ministry among them, brave words to be sure.

In addition to these words, the works Jesus accomplished among them also created wonder and amazement among some, anger and rage among others. Jesus had healed a man who was an invalid for 38 years, but because he directed the man to pick up his mat on the Sabbath the religious leaders accused him of breaking the laws of Sabbath observance. In the same way, Jesus healed the man blind from birth by rubbing mud on his eyes and restoring his sight. Yet, being the Sabbath, the religious leaders could not see the sign of God's kingdom in their very midst due to their shortsighted insistence the Sabbath had been broken. How sad, and how heartbreaking for Jesus who so wanted all his children to come to know who he was. Yet, they hated him for the things he had said and done.

Should we or can we expect any less if we are called to follow Jesus Christ? If we are truly devoted to him, if we abide in him and are filled more and more with his Spirit and character, we will certainly reflect his nature and character, however imperfectly, to the world around us. The World Evangelical Alliance estimates that 200 million Christians live in societies where they are threatened daily with persecution, torture, or even death because of their confession of faith in Jesus Christ. They also estimate that between 26 - 28 million believers were martyred in the 20th century in countries like China, North Korea, Malaysia, Sudan, the Middle East, due to their faith in Jesus Christ. "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you" said Jesus. (Jn. 15:18) Can we expect any less as we move forward?

Jesus was clear about the reason for this response: “Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world - therefore the world hates you.” (Jn. 15:19) By looking to Jesus, fixing our eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith, and following the path he set for us we are called out of the world which lives only for itself. We become more and more like Christ and less and less like those who only acknowledge themselves as lord. That’s what the church is – the ekklesia, the called out ones. Called out to be salt and light in a decaying and dark world living only for itself. If we are serious in our commitment to do this we will stand out as distinct and different for Jesus’ sake. Our words and our deeds will represent the values of the kingdom of God. Our choices in behavior at work, at home, at school, in the community will set us apart from others. In all these ways we will sooner or later encounter opposition or at least misunderstanding from those watching us. But Jesus promises the presence of the Holy Spirit will strengthen us in our testimony of word and deed. We will be enabled to live for him even when it means we will receive the same treatment Jesus did.

As we move closer to Holy Week and the remembrance of the passion of Jesus Christ, may God make us ready and able to live for him even in the face of hatred from the world!