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John 15:9-17

CHOSEN

When Jesus told his disciples that he had chosen them, they probably felt pretty special. It had to feel good to hear Jesus say to them, "you did not choose me but I chose you." We all like to be noticed, to be singled out as special, especially by people in authority, by people we look up to with respect.

Jesus even adds that he no longer calls the disciples servants but that he considers them friends. And as his chosen friends, he is letting them in on the inside information. He is going to let them know everything that he has heard from God.

We might imagine how this may have sounded to the disciples. Jesus considered them friends. Jesus was going to share with them inside information. Jesus had chosen them!

What had he chosen them for? What inside information was he about to share with this special chosen group of VIPs? Was he going to share with them that they had been chosen for special positions within his government once Jesus ascended into power? Would one of them be named Secretary of State, or the Head of Banking and Finance, or the Director of Military Affairs? Would they be chosen to be his special political advisors or to help run the palace? What had they been chosen for? They had to wonder.

But then Jesus tells them. He tells them that they have been chosen to offer love. What? To love? That's baby stuff. Come on, give us something really important to do!

But Jesus tells them that there is nothing more important for them to do than to love. It is so important that Jesus makes it a commandment. If you want to love me, he tells his disciples who are now his friends, you will love. But the kind of love he is talking about is not our

ordinary kind of love. It is not the "remember to send your Dad a birthday card" kind of love, or "remember to kiss your Mom before leaving the house" kind of love. The kind of love Jesus commanded of his disciples, his friends, was not a love that was primarily based upon feelings. It wasn't a love that even depended upon liking the other individual. Perhaps the best clue we have as to what this kind of love looks like can be found in what Jesus tells his disciples, "love one another," and then he adds this really essential piece, "*as I have loved you.*" As I have loved you. Disciples of Jesus are to love in the same way Jesus has loved.

We as the reader of this story have a full idea of what Jesus' kind of love looked like. The disciples have witnessed some of Jesus' style of love but have not yet witnessed its final act. From our vantage point as the reader, we know the full story, right up to the end. Nevertheless, the disciples have seen enough of Jesus to glean what his love looks like. They have seen Jesus care for the despised, the sinners, the social outcasts: the tax collectors, the women, the gentiles, the sick and the diseased people no one wanted to be around. They watched as Jesus stood up for the oppressed, even for people who were guilty--like that woman caught in adultery. They saw how he noticed those everyone else overlooked and how he criticized those who abused power. They saw him feed the hungry and heal the sick. This is what Jesus' love looked like.

Only later would the disciples understand what Jesus meant when he said to them, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Only later, after the crucifixion would the full scope of Jesus' love be better understood by his friends. At the crucifixion they would see his love for them even in their own weakness and failure. They would see his sacrifice. And they would understand that the love Jesus spoke about meant caring for others, acting on behalf of others at cost to yourself, even for those who don't always

behave like they deserve it. In other words, Jesus' love was about sacrifice--giving yourself, your efforts, your life, your gifts, for others.

This is what his disciples were chosen for: to love. This is what we, his disciples, have been chosen for: to love in the same way Jesus loved us.

Now clearly, loving others the way Jesus loved us is not going to be an easy task. It will be hard. It is never easy to care about people we don't like. And it is not easy to care about people who have messed up, made mistakes, done what is wrong. And it is hard, terribly hard, to love people who have hurt us. Sometimes it is a far easier thing to love a complete stranger across the world in Iraq or in Syria, to send them our assistance, to offer them our prayers, sometimes this is far easier for us to do than to love our own friends or family members who have hurt us, betrayed us, and let us down. Clearly, loving the way Jesus loves us is a difficult undertaking.

But to love the way Jesus loves is also a dangerous and radical undertaking. If we were to keep reading in our passage from John's gospel today, the talk quickly shifts from love to hate. Jesus says to his friends, "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you." And he adds, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you." Jesus warns us that to love as he commands us will not always win us friends and very well may create some enemies.

We think of loving others as an innocent, kind, generous activity. But what we may fail to appreciate is that to love with Jesus' love is a highly political act. Love is political. If you love someone but notice that they are hungry, or see that they are mistreated, or recognize that they are in need, or understand that they are discriminated against or exploited or ignored, if we see their suffering and do nothing, then our love is empty and meaningless. It's not even really love. Jesus' love moves us to act, to include those who are excluded, to extend care, to treat

others with dignity regardless of their condition or status. And that kind of love is political. By political, I mean, it is an act that confronts how humans structure our society and our relationships. Jesus' love commands us to include the outsider. Jesus' love commands us to forgive the guilty. Jesus' love commands us to care for the stranger. Jesus' love commands us to speak out for the oppressed. To be a Christian is to love. And to love quite often compels us to be at odds with the conventional norms of our society which tell us who is acceptable, who is included, who is to be valued. If we have any doubts that love is political, we only have to look to Jesus, whose love led him to be arrested and executed as a political radical.

We see examples of this love in our contemporary lives: the love that prompted Gentiles in Nazi Europe to defy the politics of the day and hide and assist Jews; the love that prompts medical volunteers today to risk their lives in war-torn countries like Syria; the love that prompts people and congregations to assist refugees in resettling, and standing by them as they sometimes face discrimination or exploitation.

To love others as Jesus loves means we will trouble the waters of society and in our personal relationships. But for this you and I have been chosen. For this we have been selected by Jesus to undertake the most important task in the world: to love. Which is the most important and the most radical thing we will do in our lives.