

“One Love – You Got to Do What You Should”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

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Holy Scriptures: John 15: 9-17 Acts 10: 44-49 Revelation 21: 1-6

John 15: 9-17

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Acts 10: 44-49

Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit

44 While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Revelation 21: 1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

One Love-- *You got to do what you should*

Imagine if the book of Revelation

had been placed before the Gospels, serving as a prelude, an introduction

rather than afterward, as an endnote, as an exclamation point.

We tend to think of Revelation as apocalypse;

can we re-imagine the Word as announcement?

Revelation 21: 3-4 – John of Patmos said, “*I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals.*

He will dwell with them as their God;

they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;

he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

In Acts 10, Peter dares to ask his neighbors who wonder if God's love is for everyone,

saying, "*Can anyone withhold the water
for baptizing these people*

*who have received the Holy
Spirit just as we have?"*

*So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of
Jesus Christ.*

Then they invited him to stay for several days.

To put his question another way,

*"Why would you prevent someone from being
baptized?"*

Or to put it even more straightforward,

Who would you keep from the love of God?

Who would you shoo away from the Lord's
Table?

Whom do you deem not worthy of being loved,

of being included in the conversation and the
community,

of having equal access and equal participation
and equal rights?

My friends, if we are not going to treat all people equally,
with respect and love,

if we are not going to affirm everyone's call to

serve the Risen Christ,

if we are not going to offer the same
sacraments to one and all,

then we need to stop baptizing
folks.

But if we are going to baptize and share the Cup,

then we need to go all the way.

We need to invite people to stay for a few days, and be
included.

Come on in and set yourself down;

be a part of the family and we will be a part of yours.

Adaptive change is good for the soul, but it doesn't happen
right away.

Peter didn't change overnight.

Peter continued to wrestle with the depth and breadth of
God's loving activity.

In the next chapter, in Acts 11,

Peter was still not sure who was to be included in the
human community,

who was included in the whole people of God,

and then he had a dream in which

"But a second time the voice answered from heaven,

‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’”

Peter then went on to lead the church to reach out to the Gentile community,

taking the Church of Jesus Christ farther afield than Jesus ever did.

You see, in the eyes of God

love knows no colors, no borders, no boundaries, no limits or conditions.

Love simply is.

Jesus said we are to love as God has loved us.

You got to do what you should.

In the Gospel According to John,

Jesus gave us a direct order before he went to the Cross, saying,

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you,

you also should love one another.

No one has greater love than this,

to lay down one's life for one's friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you."

One Love -- *You got to do what you should*

The holy Scriptures are wisdom sayings, prayers and songs, stories and letters

that serve to teach us about God, about love and relationships,

and especially about ourselves.

The moment you think you are examining the Bible

you find out the Word is examining you.

You can learn a whole lot of theology from country music, too.

Here are some classic lines from popular songs:

- *"Our marriage was a failure,
but our divorce ain't working either."*
- *"When we said I do you did but you don't anymore."*
- *"If you want to keep your beer real cold
put it next to my ex-wife's heart."*
- *"Drop kick me, Jesus, through the goal posts of life."*
- *"I don't care if it rains or freezes"*

long as I've got my plastic Jesus on the dashboard of my truck."

Whether his image is on our dashboard or tattooed on our shoulder,

we are continually struck by Jesus' commandment to us to love one another.

"This is my commandment,

that you love one another as I have loved you.

Can you command someone to love?

And will he or she listen and obey?

Remember the classic country ballad covered by blues guitarist Bonnie Raitt,

"I Can't Make You Love Me"

The song was written after a Nashville songwriter

read a news article about a guy who was rejected by his girlfriend,

got drunk, and shot her car full of holes.

The judge asked if he had learned anything from the experience

and he answered, *"I learned, Your Honor,*

that you can't make a woman love you if she don't."

The songwriter sat down and penned these words:

*Turn down the lights, turn down the bed Turn down
these voices inside my head Lay down with me, tell
me no lies Just hold me close, don't patronize – don't
patronize me Cause I can't make you love me if you
don't You can't make your heart feel something it
won't Here in the dark, in these lonely hours I will
lay down my heart and Ill feel the power But you
won't, no you won't cause I can't make you love me, if
you don't*

Song speaks to heartache; it sings of loneliness; it touches
the ache everyone feels

who simply wants to be loved and to love in
return.

Jesus understands, and he initiates the healing and the hope.
Jesus initiates relationships.

He enters our lives and welcomes us home.

He seeks us out and invites us in.

He enables us to be born again and again and again, and to
have eternal life.

He forgives our wayward ways and shows us new pathways
to journey.

He inspires the beloved community and issues a command to
love.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Jesus calls us friends.

This is no ordinary friendship.

This is a friendship that God has already initiated,

one that is intended to result in commitment and trust

on the part of those who identify themselves with God.

Friendship with Jesus is not about membership in an exclusive club.

It’s about responding to a call

for service above self and loving faithfulness.

The quality of the relationship with Jesus

is characterized by his commandment,

“that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Jesus commands his friends to love,

to live and give sacrificially and unconditionally and abundantly,

and to do so joyfully and honestly.

Can you command someone to love, and expect them to obey?

How is that working for you?

Go ahead, try saying,

*“I order you, I command you to love someone,
something, some place”*

and see what happens!

You may end up in a country music song...

One Love – *you got to do what you should*

There is a tremendous temptation

among religious leaders and faith communities to
legislate love,

to seek to legislate morality

through the passing of laws, ordinances and
legal restrictions.

I say to you today that these so-called morality laws are
immoral and unethical.

We have sat back and silently watched and worried for far
too long

as followers of the same God of love that we profess and
follow as well

have put forth amendments and laws that were

proposed,

and sometimes put into effect,

to ban books in school libraries,

limit civil rights to only a portion of the
population,

hinder stem cell research and health care,

deny immigration to hard working and loving
neighbors,

ignore the plight of children who are victims of
bullying,

and hamper effective sex education

while thousands of our beloved
neighbors and friends

needlessly suffer and die from
HIV/AIDS.

Are you like me, wondering aloud why some loving couples

are afforded 1,400 legal and tax benefits through
state-sanctioned marriage

while other couples, just as loving and
committed,

are denied these very same benefits and
legal recognition?

Are you like me, ashamed as an American to be linked
with the laws recently passed and signed into effect
in Arizona, Georgia, Alabama, and elsewhere,
sanctioning local police officers to question and
arrest human beings
suspected of being immigrants
based on the color of their skin or
the language they speak?

Are you like me, a direct descendent of immigrants who
came to this nation

– whether by choice or by force or by necessity --
seeking life, liberty and the pursuit of
happiness?

As citizens of a global village, we are paying attention and we
are appalled.

If your skin is brown and your accent is Hispanic,

be careful to take ID with you when you go walk to the
store to get milk

for your family in Phoenix or Atlanta or
Birmingham.

[The host of NPR's "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me" said,

“Make sure not to wear something that reads,

‘My mother smuggled me across the desert and all I got was this lousy t-shirt.’”]

One Love -- *You got to do what you should*

My friends, how would the world look today, what would America be like

if all the energy and money and media attention

used to legislate morality

had instead been harvested to practice a relational Christian love?

President Truman said that,

“90% of the world’s problems would be solved

if people would just do what they are supposed to do.”

In other words, if we would simply follow the commandment to love,

if we practiced what we preached and proclaimed,

we would not need to legislate or impose our morality on anyone else.

Law is transactional, and love is relational.

Love is relational -- behave and act lovingly,
unconditionally,

and your attitude and life will change accordingly.

Did you ever notice that attitude change follows behavioral
change?

Try it.

I saw a bright, happy poster in a classroom in a local high
school that said,

“Change your attitude, change your life.”

That approach is backwards, folks.

Change how you act,

and your attitude will get a life-lift.

Jesus can't make us love one another if we won't,

but he sure can give us a directive, a commandment,

an inspiring word of hope to help us to change
our behavior,

to incarnate the Love that has been so
graciously revealed to us all.

Listen to the last refrain from U2's outstanding, unifying song, "One"

*One love / One blood / One life You got to do what
you should One life / With each other Sisters and my
/ Brothers One life / But we're not the same We get to
/ Carry each other / Carry each other Can You hear
us coming Lord / Can You hear us call Feel us
knocking / We're knocking at Your door*

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!