

Several years ago, a professor named Randy Pausch gave his "Last Lecture", but not because he was retiring. At the age of 45, he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer; he had been told that he had 3-6 months to live. He was a wildly popular professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon University; the day of his "last lecture", the room was packed to overflowing. Among other things, he spoke to the students of the importance of overcoming obstacles and the importance of seizing every moment, "because time is all you have... and you may find one day that you have less than you think." He also said things like, "Show gratitude; tell the truth; never give up."

Jesus gave his version of a "last lecture." On his final evening with his disciples, he celebrated the "Last Supper" with them. But in the Gospel of John, there's the additional story of what happened that night: Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. After he finishes washing their feet, he tells them that one of them will betray him; Judas immediately leaves the gathering, going out into the night. The final events of Jesus' life have now begun. He knows that this is the beginning of the end. So he speaks parting words to his disciples; he gives them his "last lecture."

These parting words come to us in the Gospel of John, chapter 13: 31-35.

*When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Jesus made a habit of expanding commandments from OT, raising the bar. In a series of statements, he says, You have heard it said...: but I say...

You have heard it said: "You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made"; but I say: "do not swear at all, either by heaven or by earth."

You have heard it said: "You shall not commit adultery"; but I say: "if you look at someone with lust in your heart, you have already committed adultery."

You have heard it said: "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy"; but I say: "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you."

In the text that I just read, Jesus is doing this again, if not with the same sentence structure. Earlier, when Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, he quoted two different commandments from the OT: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might" and "love your neighbor as yourself". This has rightly been considered to be the cornerstone of Christianity – the greatest commandment. But in the text that I just read, Jesus takes even this one step further, setting a new standard, expanding the original intent to new depths, raising the bar. He is basically saying, "You have heard it said to love your neighbor as yourself", but I say, "Love one another as I have loved you". Wow... that's a lot harder than even loving our

neighbors as ourselves. Jesus' love for us is deep and wide and pure and full of mercy and tenderness and forgiveness.

Jesus is clear here: the important thing is not the content of what we believe; the important thing is how we live, how we love. Jesus does not say, "They will know you are my disciples if you believe the right things." Wars have been fought, and millions of people killed, over "correct doctrine" – in Europe, Protestants and Catholics killed each other over who was "right"; they were all Christians, but they focused on their differences in doctrine rather than living out this commandment from Jesus. More recently, Christian denominations here in the US have fought such bitter arguments over who is "right" on different topics of doctrine that they have splintered or exploded. No wonder many people look at the church and decide they want nothing to do with it.

Here at Triune, we are a diverse bunch: look around and you can see it. What you cannot see is our diversity of opinion, our differences in doctrine, our wide variety of theological views. These differences could divide us, but we don't want to go there. Deb has been very intentional about not creating a "statement" of Triune beliefs, even though some people have asked for it. The "glue" that holds us together is not a certain set of beliefs that we all have to agree with, but the love of Jesus that transcends our differences, whatever they may be.

Years ago, a man named William Toms said, "Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some person ever reads."

A pastor named Bobby Conway said basically the same thing with different words: "Every Christian's life is sending a message. The question is, "What kind of message are we sending?" As followers of Jesus, our lives are on display."

St. Francis said it this way: "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."

In 1913, at the age of 28, Karen Blixen moved from her native Denmark to Africa, to what is now Kenya, where she and her husband ran a coffee plantation. Years later, she wrote a memoir about her life there, entitled Out of Africa, which of course was made into the movie with Meryl Streep and Robert Redford. In the book, Blixen tells this story: A teenager named Kitau appeared at the door one day to ask for a job as a domestic servant. She hired him. Three months later, he asked her for a letter of recommendation to Sheik Ali bin Salim, a Muslim who lived in a nearby town. She was very surprised, and offered to raise his pay in order to keep him. But he refused her offer. He went on to tell her that he had decided to become either a Christian or a Muslim, and his purpose in working for her had been to see, up close, the way a Christian lives. Now that he had worked for her and seen the ways of Christians, he would go and observe Sheik Ali to see how Muslims behave; then he would decide. He had never asked her what she believed; he was simply watching her to see how she lived. In her memoir, she writes that she sure wished Kitau had told her that earlier.

So, what kind of message are we sending? What do people learn about Jesus by observing the way we live our lives? Might they see the power of Jesus to address addiction? Might they see the joy of Jesus that is possible even in the midst of hardship and struggle? Might they see our love for people who believe very differently than we do on hot-button issues? Might they see love lived out in the Triune community, as we give and receive holy encouragement and support? Love is the goal, and love is the pathway to the goal. Living a middle-class life with all the trappings is not the goal. You don't have to live in a house to love. You don't have to have a lot of education to love. You don't have to own a car to love. You don't have to have a job to love. Yet loving as Jesus loved is a goal none of us can live up to completely. As New Testament scholar D.A. Carson wrote, this commandment to love is "simple enough for a young child to understand and memorize, and it is profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice." The bar is high. A new standard has been set. Jesus' parting words are clear: "Love one another as I have loved you. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples."