Love One Another

October 4, 2026
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John 13:1-5, 34-35 (NRSVUE)
Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. [2] The devil had already decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper [3] Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, [4] got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. [5] Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

(Jesus said to them,) [34] 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."

A woman walks with her husband along a boardwalk, enjoying the final evening of their vacation. She notices a man staring as he walks toward them. He is saying something, but she can't quite make it out. Then, as the distance between them closes, she reads his lips before she hears his voice – repeating over and over again as he looks at her: "Jew."

A first-year college student is considering Greek life, and decides to check a couple of houses during rush week with his friends. As it happens, his three companions are White; his father is Japanese and his mother is African-American. As they ascend the steps to the front door, his friends are ushered in without comment. But the guy monitoring the door puts his hand up and looks him up and down. "What *are* you, anyway?"

A group of friends walk back to their car after the game, jubilant after a home victory. They're laughing and talking, not paying much attention to their surroundings. One of them bumps into a man coming the other way, who is wearing a red ball cap. He says, "excuse me," and continues on. One of them shouts over their shoulder, "Fascist!" and they all laugh.

We are in a season where "othering" is commonplace. The midterm elections are a little more than four weeks away, which only magnifies the rampant polarization and tribalism in our society. If you're like me, you keep the remote close by when watching television so you can mute the ever-present campaign commercials. Maybe you're limiting your social media time to reduce your exposure to political propaganda or avoid being drawn into pointless partisan arguments. But even when you try to tune them out or not tune in at all, they'll find you – in pamphlets hung on your doorknob or text messages delivered to your phone.

Campaigns are constructed on hyperbole and sensationalism. Parties and political action committees inflate the accomplishments of their candidate while overstating the missteps of their opponent. And in the fast-paced world of 140-character messages and 30-second TV-spots, most don't even bother to present their qualifications. It's faster – and more effective – to trash the other person's record and impugn their character. That leaves us with the sense that the best we can do is to choose between the lesser of two bad options…and the impression that not only do we not want these people leading us; we wouldn't even trust them to be alone with our children for ten minutes.

We're also living in a time when we're all feeling, in the words of Bill McKibben, exhausted and demoralized. The Earth's oceans are warming, bringing climate catastrophes – a Nepali river flooding its banks

and washing away entire villages, wildfires destroying entire neighborhoods in California in just a few hours' time. AI tech billionaires – including the world's first trillionaire – speculate whether our species will survive their initial public offerings. Authoritarian leaders expand their territory and wage war on their own people. Oil prices climb, making everything less affordable. Health care costs are rising at an unsustainable rate, and we're bracing ourselves for the millions who will soon be without health insurance while the rest of us eye another double-digit increase in premiums. We're subjected to daily tantrums from the Oval Office and grandstanding from members of Congress. No wonder we're feeling more untethered than at any point in our lifetimes. McKibben writes, "We definitely weren't designed to cope with all this — our bodies, our nervous systems, our brains. Among all the other dangers these developments represent, they're simply wearing us out."[1]

That's why at Church of the Saviour, every other October, we participate in the Campaign for Kindness created by our friends at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Kansas. The campaign coincides with election season, either during a presidential campaign or the midterms, like this year. We participate to remind ourselves who we are called to be, even in times of turmoil and profound disagreement. We also participate to spread a message of kindness in our communities. We have yard signs you can place in your front yard so that, in a sea of campaign signs everywhere competing for our attention, you can help promote *a different kind of campaign*: a campaign that reminds us to Love One Another.

We know that we're in a season where "othering" is commonplace, and we've grown accustomed to it. But why? Why do we "other" people in the first place? One reason is boundary marking. We tend to define ourselves by who is in our group, our circle, our tribe. And one of the most common ways to identify "us" is by defining "them." Frankly, it's easier to say what we are against than it is to say what we are for. *We're* not like *them*, because *they* believe X or *they* practice Z. *They* dress differently. *They* eat different foods. *They* have a different language, different customs, different family structures, different values. We perceive our own beliefs or our practices as "normal" and look with suspicion on those that are different… or that we simply don't understand.

Another reason for "othering" is blame. There are times when we are harmed or miss opportunities because of someone else. But blaming others for our problems is often a means of avoidance. If it's someone else's fault that things aren't going our way, we don't have to face our own shortcomings. And then we can feel justified taking out our anger and aggression against our perceived enemies. This is the underlying reason for xenophobia, and it's the same motivation that fuels much of our political, religious, and racial polarization. Maybe there's some truth in it. Or, perhaps, it's no one's "fault" at all. We just want *someone* to blame.

"Othering" does more than just divide us. Researcher Clint Curle frames it this way: Othering involves zeroing in on a difference and using that difference to dismantle a sense of similarity or connectedness between people. Othering sets the stage for discrimination or persecution by reducing empathy and preventing genuine dialogue. Taken to an extreme, othering can result in one group of people denying that another group is even human.[2]

Today is World Communion Sunday, celebrated by Christians around the world as a day of coming together at Christ's table. It is a powerful reminder of both our diversity as people from every race, nation, and culture, and our oneness in Christ. As we prepare to come to *this* table today, we might also reflect on the *other* tables Jesus shared. He ate with "tax collectors and sinners" at the house of the apostle Matthew, a former tax collector (Matthew 9:9-17). He went to a meal in the home of Simon the Pharisee, where the guests were scandalized by a woman, a known "sinner," who broke open an alabaster jar and anointed Jesus's feet (Luke 7:36-50). He visited the house of Zacchaeus, a dishonest tax collector who cheated his own neighbors (Luke

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[1] Bill McKibben. "I'm Exhausted. You're Demoralized. We Weren't Built for a World Like This." *The New York Times.* September 29, 2026.

[2] Clint Curle. "Us vs. Them: The process of othering." Canadian Museum for Human Rights. Published January 24, 2020. https://humanrights.ca/story/us-vs-them-process-othering

19:1-10). Jesus had a reputation for eating with all the wrong people, but also fellowshipping with religious leaders and other "acceptable" people, who were often his most ardent critics. He spent his life un-othering others and urging us to do the same.

And then on that night when he gathered with his disciples for the final time, he demonstrated this barrier-breaking love in a tangible way, kneeling and washing their feet like a servant, not the master. He told them to follow his example, and that they would be known as his disciples by the way they loved. Yes, in that room he was among friends. But these were friends who he knew would soon abandon him in his darkest hour. Peter, his most passionate disciple, would deny that he even knew him – which Jesus foretold in the very next breath. And Judas was there, too. He left the room that night to betray Jesus, but not until *after* Jesus had washed their feet: *all* of their feet. He knew they would fail, and he loved them anyway.

Friends, especially in this season of "othering," the church must lead the way. If we don't, where does all of this lead? We are called to make room at our tables, to build bridges of relationship, to love not just when it is easy, but when it costs us something.

That doesn't mean we surrender our principles. We need to continue to defend the cause of justice, to stand with the oppressed, to speak for the voiceless. But we must find a way to establish dialogue across differences, not reinforce them. I know it's hard, especially when facing a culture that peddles misinformation and half-truths. But Jesus didn't set conditions or make exceptions. We shouldn't, either. Battles don't build relationships. Love does. And relationships are the key. We must love people into a better way of living for all of us. I thank God that there were people in my life who loved me when I was at my worst, who stuck with me and helped me to better live the faith I claimed. I want to be that person for others.

Jesus gave us a new commandment to love one another, and he set an example for us to follow. We were not there in the upper room. We didn't run away when he was arrested. We didn't pretend we didn't know him while he was on trial. We didn't sell him out for thirty pieces of silver. But each of us, in one way or another, have walked away from Jesus, denied him, and are guilty of our own personal acts of betrayal. And yet, he still calls us friends. What Jesus did, he did for all of us. And he continues to love us, no matter what. *We* love because *he* first loved *us*.

We're all "others" to someone. Love is how we change that. In this time of exhaustion and demoralization, let's be part of the solution, not contribute to the problem. Jesus showed us how. It's up to us to follow. Amen.

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