

Well, hey everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. It's great to see you. Let's do this. Let's give each other a big welcome from all of our campuses whether you're in Denton, Flower Mound, Gainesville, Lewisville, The Venue, somewhere in the world at our online campus, let's welcome together. It's great to be with you. And recently pastor John asked some of us on the teaching team if we would just share a message with the church from a burden that's been on our heart, just a prayer that we have been praying on our hearts for the Valley Creek family. And over this past season, just the past couple years, there's been something God's been taking me through time and time again, in some hard ways, some confusing ways, ultimately some good ways.

The past couple years, particularly the last ones have been some of the hardest in my life. And God's had me on this journey of showing me that the best thing that I can do is to live in love. And so our prayer for us is simply this. We pray that we would love each other as Jesus loved us. Love each other as Jesus loved us. And I say that and like some of us immediately, that's really refreshing, that's hopeful, it feels relevant because last couple years there's just been a lot going on in the world and people are more in self-preservation mode, so we don't feel noticed, we don't feel seen, don't feel cared for, definitely don't feel loved. Some of us hear that and think, I've probably heard everything there is to hear about love, maybe we could talk about something else.

But let me just encourage you, could you just lean in and be open to a fresh perspective about love, being open to something new about love because the love of Jesus changes everything? And so we pray that we would love each other as Jesus loved us and here's why. You see, over this last season and even right here in this family, I have experienced some of the most intense hurt that I ever have, but also some of the most profound healing that I ever have. I have found myself losing hope, but I have discovered new levels of hope. And maybe you can relate to some of that, maybe in this past season you've been discouraged, you've doubted, you've questioned, you've been disoriented and maybe you've discovered some new things. But in this season, I have experienced the love of God in ways that I never have and it's changed me. It's radically changed me. It's changed the people around me. I've seen love do things that only love can do.

And I want to see more of that. Like I want to see the love of God on display here all the time. And so let's do this, let me kind of go back to where Jesus rolls this whole concept, this thinking about love, out. He says in John 13:34, "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Now we hear loving like Jesus loved and that sounds nice and rosy. That sounds pleasant. But it's probably different than you think because that means laying your life down. So put it bluntly, that's overwhelming. I mean that means doing some things that you don't want to do. That means having an endless supply of grace. That means being willing to be taken advantage of. It means some specifics like this, it's like being willing to do the dishes and the laundry for your spouse when you don't even want to talk to them.

It means -- that one resonated. It means -- it means -- it means giving your son or your daughter a hug or your mom or your dad and just saying, hey, it's okay, when you've been fighting. It means forgiving that friend who's been talking bad about you behind your back and they won't even say I'm sorry. We hear that like, ugh, like I don't -- I don't think I like that. Maybe not. But ask somebody who's received that kind of love because that kind of love changes the world which is what Jesus came to do and he came to do it through love. So when Jesus said I have a new command, what he was doing was he was getting ready to change everything everybody knew about love. And when he says he has a new command, that means there's an old command. So catch this, what's the old command? You have to go to Matthew 22 for that. And Jesus, he's been dialoguing with some religious leaders and one of them a expert in the law comes to Jesus and he says, "Teacher, what's the greatest commandment in all the law?"

Everything, all 613 commands, everything that the prophets have said, what's the greatest? And Jesus says, "It's to love the lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength. That's the first and greatest commandment. And the second is just like it, love your neighbor as yourself. He says all the law and all the prophets hang on those two. He starts messing with everything anybody's known about what's important and what's a priority and he starts with saying love is at the top. This is the most important thing you can do. And then he levels the playing field between loving God and loving people. He said they're equal. This is the first and greatest, but the second is just like it. He basically sums up the entire Bible they have at the time all into these two things, saying if you would just do these -- if you would just love God and love others, everything else gets swept up into that because everything flows from love.

So that's the old command. But let me take you to the new command that Jesus starts to lay out. See, this is right in the last week of Jesus's life. For three years, he's been journeying with the disciples and now he's come into his final moments with them. So it says, "Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. And he had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he showed them the full extent of his love." Another translation says he loved them to the end. And it's not talking about a period of time, it's talking about how far his love was going to go. For three years, he's been journeying with them and he's been showing them love and now in these last final moments with them, he says, now I really want to show you how far my love goes. And so what does he do?

He takes off his outer robe, he wraps a towel around his waist, he gets a basin of water, gets down on his hands and knees and he starts to wash the feet of each one of his disciples. Now, let me just say washing feet is gross no matter what, but in this time, this is disgusting. Okay, they don't have great footwear back then. You're talking everyone is either in sandals or they're barefoot. There's no paved roads, everything's dirt and there's no vehicles. Everything is transported by animals. So you've got bare feet, open toe, dirt and a lot of poo. So this is

rough feet. This isn't like mowing your yard and you step in something, you spray it off. This is nasty. And here's the Son of God is on his hands and knees, bare-handed he is washing the feet of each of these men.

And as he does this one after another, I'm sure in true disciple fashion they're all wondering like, what's going on, why is he doing this? And just if you're ever slow to pick up on revelation, just you're in good company. The disciples could rarely pick up on what Jesus was laying down. So he washes all of their feet and when he's finished, he asks them a question, he says, do you understand what I just did for you? You call me master, teacher, lord and that's correct. But did you pay attention to what I just did? That if I'm your master and I would serve you this way, here's the thing, I want you to follow my example. I want you to do as I do. What he's saying to them is, hey, this how you live free. Jesus was the most free person that ever walked the face of the earth and he invites us to do the same thing. But can we just pause and acknowledge that's a pretty tough act to follow? Like, Jesus, you're really asking me to love and serve the people that are below me?

You're asking me to do the most humble and menial tasks for other people? What Jesus is saying is, yeah, because love leads to love. Love doesn't check out. Love doesn't fade. Love doesn't go away. Being loved leads to loving. So when was the last time you loved somebody like that where it required you to humble yourself in order to love them? Like maybe it was swallowing that response, that well-crafted argument or that text or that post and instead saying or typing those three little words that can seem so impossible, you are right or I am sorry. Maybe it's helping somebody with a practical need without them even asking and go getting their groceries, carpooling their kids, taking care of their yard and that person is somebody who's offended you, who's wronged you.

Maybe it's publicly celebrating somebody, giving them the credit when you know behind their back they've been trying to take it all from you. Let me say it like this, Jesus is saying can you love them in a language that they can hear? You ever heard of the five love languages? These are really popular around like parenting and marriage and, you know, there's gifts, there's acts of service, there's quality time, there's words of affirmation, there's physical touch. What Jesus is saying is, can you love them in a way that they can receive it because that's how I loved you? I loved you in a language that you can hear. We think about gifts. Jesus gave us the gift of himself. He gave us grace. He gave us faith. He gave us the Holy Spirit. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. Or maybe if it's physical touch, he gave us the gift of the Father's embrace, a reconciled relationship with the Father.

Think about quality time. He says, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. He doesn't just give us some time, he gives us all of his time and when we need it most he is there. Or acts of service, the one person who deserved to be served by everybody said, I didn't come to be served but to serve and give my life for you. Or words of affirmation, in the beginning was the word. Jesus is the word of life and he speaks every word that your heart needs to hear. He

loves us in a language that we can hear. But the breakdown happens when we speak to others in ways that they can't receive it. And so it can seem impossible to be loving somebody that way until you realize that's exactly how Jesus loved you and me. He loved us in languages we could hear so we can go and do the same for others.

I mean 1 John 3:16, "This how we know what love is: that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." He willingly gave it, offered it, not when we were at our best, when we were at our worst, when we were far from him, when we were turned from him, he was willingly giving, laying down, loving us in ways that we could understand. He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." He says, I'm loving you with a love that has no end, no boundaries, it's everlasting. And I'm drawing you, I'm pulling you to myself with kindness, an unfailing kindness. Can I ask you? Are you aware of that? Are you aware that Jesus is loving you this way? He's drawing you with his kindness to you? He's loving you with a love that has no boundaries?

Have you forgotten that? I know in this season that I have, it's been hard for me to remember and Jesus shows me over and over that his love isn't a feeling, it's an action. His love is an action verb. He's always showing me his love over and over even when I don't do it, even when I mess it up, he's showing me and he's saying, hey, I've loved you like this and just like I love the disciples and I remind them by saying, look at me, he does the same for us. When we forget and we find it so hard to love others, he say, hey, look at how I've loved you. Look at me, look how I have loved you. And after showing them an incredible display of love through the foot washing, Jesus goes to a whole another level with it. And he's preparing to share the Passover meal with these guys. And it's -- you know, as we're preparing to go into Easter, this kind of some similar time that's playing out here.

Can we just -- let's have the same posture as the disciples. Let's lean into everything Jesus has for us today, over these next couple of weeks as we come into Easter. So they're preparing to share the Passover meal, the bread and the cup. And Jesus is in anguish because he loves them so much and yet he knows one of them is going to betray him. And he says, hey, this night one of you is going to betray me. And Peter, he's sitting across the table and he motions to John because he's sitting right beside Jesus reclining and he says, hey, ask him who it is. And so John says, well, which one of us is it? And Jesus says, well, it's the one to whom I dip the bread in the cup and I give it to. And then he proceeds to take the bread, he dips in the cup and he gives it to Judas. What you may not understand is in those days the host of the dinner, in order to show who the honored guest at the table was, they would take the bread and dip it in the cup and give it to them first.

And what Jesus was doing in that moment was the unthinkable. The most unloving person in the room, Judas, he got down on his hands and knees and humbly and lowly loved him by serving him. The most dishonorable person in the room, Jesus said, I honor you. Judas who sold him out, who betrayed him and sent him into the worst suffering the world has ever known

and crucifixion and death, Jesus looked at him and said, I love you, you are my honored guest. That's the kind of love that Jesus is talking about. Now, think about this, think about every time that you take communion, that bread and that cup, when Jesus is offering you the bread of life he's doing the same thing. When we have failed, when we have messed up when we have turned our back on him, when we have been Judas, he says, I love you, you are my honored guest.

This the love that Jesus put on display. And then he makes the great invitation. He says, alright, after everything I've shown you, "A new command I give you: love one another." They know the old command was like this, love one another as you love yourself. Now, "as I have loved you, so you must love one another." This was the standard before, but he said, now it's this. Love like I have loved you. It's changing everything about love. And realize what's happening for the disciples in this moment. They're starting to piece together everything Jesus is telling them about love and what his love is. They're capturing everything that's happening in this moment of how he's showing love and they're going back on this three-year journey with him. They're looking at over the last three years and how at the beginning he called them when they were at their worst he believed in them, and then journeyed with them. And when they bickered and they fought and they argued and they jockeyed for position and they were exclusive and they bailed and they failed and they doubted and they walked away, he didn't mention any of that, he just loves them to new levels of love.

And he says, as I've loved you, love each other. And the more they could focus on the love of Jesus, the more they could love each other that way. And that's the same thing that empowers us because love leads to love. But if there's no love flowing in there's no love that's flowing out. But loving like Jesus, like what really is that love? Because the gospels have a great explanation of all the love of Jesus, but there's a good summary of it in 1 Corinthians. This is what love is, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It's not rude, it's not self-seeking, it's not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

This is how he loved the disciples and this how he loves you and me. When we just want to barrel through life on our own, make our own decisions, go our own way, Jesus is out of sight, out of mind, he is being patient with us and kind with us. When we make mistake after mistake, failure after failure, he is not getting angered. In fact, he's keeping no record of it. It's gone. That's the way that Jesus is loving us. But let me ask you a question, like look through that and just pick a word out and let me ask you, which one of these is hard for you to do? Which one of those is hard for you to walk out? in love?

There's another question. Which one of these is hard for you to receive? So we have no love to give past what we have received. The only love we can give is the love that we have received from Jesus. We don't have a loving problem, we have a receiving problem. That's

why Jesus says, we love because he first loved us. The key to loving others is first receiving the love of Jesus for ourselves. He's the source of our love and so we have this prayer that we would love each other the way Jesus loves us, but within that is a prayer to receive the love of Jesus. So in case you're not aware of it today, let me just tell you, you are loved. Jesus loves you fully, completely to the end, he loves you.

You may feel separated from that love, you may not be aware of it, but he loves you in a language that you can hear. And it's not just a feeling. His love is an action. He's showing you. It's protecting you, pursuing you, providing for you, persevering for you. That's the love Jesus has for us. But are you receiving it? That's the question God's been asking me a hundred times over this last season. See, I told you the last couple years have been really tough, particularly this last year. And if I'm totally honest, I have blown it in living this out, totally blown. And I know it's been hard for everybody. Like there's been this storm over everyone's life, but it's felt like within that storm we've had this personal storm that just has been slamming us. So last July, we sold our house and in August we bought another one which in this market just, that alone is crazy. And we bought a house that we knew we were going to do complete renovation, like huge projects.

And we've got four kids and two dogs and a cat and so, man, that's just chaos in our life and in our house. And some of those projects are still going on today. And at the same time that that was happening, my wife's little brother went into the hospital with COVID, and he got admitted into the ICU and then after a few weeks he ended up passing away. It was a shock to our family. And at the exact same time that that's going on, we were going through really the most difficult and intense just kind of hurtful season as parents that we ever had. And so really, it just felt like life was falling apart everywhere. Everywhere. And all I could do was focus on my situation, my circumstance. That's really all I could look at. And so I was overwhelmed with the house, I was overwhelmed with things in our marriage, I was overwhelmed with things with our my parenting, I was overwhelmed with hurt, I was just overwhelmed with life. You know, still trying to do my job and my wife run her business, and we got four kids with school and activities and all that.

And all I could do was see those circumstances. And you know what you get when you focus on your circumstances? Nothing. You get nothing. In fact, they just take. The more I focus on the circumstance, actually the less that I had. And it was even worse for my wife. Like she was in a worse place of just being disoriented and tired and frustrated. And instead of being able to love her like Jesus, I was cold and I was distant, and I was agitated and reactive. And that didn't make anything better, that just made things worse. So things just felt really hopeless, they felt very discouraging. But -- and this is a really important but. This is why you don't check out, this is why you don't go do it alone. We weren't fully receiving the love of Jesus for ourselves and we weren't loving each other the way that Jesus loves but people in our life were.

We had people right here in this family that were receiving the love of Jesus and they were releasing the love of Jesus to us. And this was us at our worst. Like this was us keeping people at a distance. This was us being a shell of ourselves. This was us not having anything to give in return. And yet wave after wave of people cared for us. They came and helped with our kids. They wrote us cards and gave us gifts. They provided meals. I had somebody that was taking care of my yard which like my yard is my hobby. So if I can't take care of my yard, you know it's -- like whatever's going on is a big deal, that was somebody loving me in a language that I could hear. The love of God was on display to us. And as I saw the love of Jesus on display, my focus began to shift. And I could see the love of Jesus at work in them and through them and I could see the love of Jesus at work in me.

I could see how at my worst when I was hopeless, Jesus was being kind to me, patient, keeping no record of wrongs. He was encouraging me, he was persevering with me, he was giving me back hope in the midst of what felt like a hopeless situation. And it changed everything about what I was seeing and I could see in a whole new way the why behind this command Jesus gave us. See, the next verse continues with the why Jesus gives this new command, why this is one of the greatest things we can do, why this is a prayer for us. He says, hey, "A new command I give you: love one another. As I've loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." He said this, the way you love each other like me, is supposed to be the primary identifier to the world around you about who you are.

And I had a really great external view of that verse. Like oh, yes, great. When we love each other, that's how people out there know it. But I realized, I'm included in everyone. I'm in there. And so as the people of God began to love me the way that Jesus loved me, it reminded me who they are, it reminded me who he is and it reminded me who I am. And that began to change me because identity determines behavior. And it took being loved like Jesus by the people of Jesus to remind me who I am in Jesus, that I am loved and everything is possible. Like it was amazing what happened as just my focus began to shift as Jesus was being put on display. And as I saw the love of Jesus, healing began to come into me and healing began to come into our home. And everything began to change. And did all of our circumstances change? No.

But did we change? Yes. Because when you're receiving the love of Jesus and you're loving each other like Jesus, it changes you. And I believe Jesus wants to do that for you and he wants to do that through you. And that's why this is a prayer for us. You see, not only did it help me repent and change my thinking, but I saw this world around us started to take notice. We had neighbors and family who were seeing what was happening, asking and they were being shocked at the love of God that was on display and then it actually started to draw them to this family. And that's why this is such a big deal. And that's what Jesus is doing all along, he's drawing people by his love because love is what causes the world to stop and take notice. And when we are loving the way that Jesus loved, Jesus is put on display, and when Jesus is

put on display you can't help but stop and take notice. And here's the thing, that's happening all the time around here.

Like I see it in circles. I see when people are in circles are struggling, when they need help, when they're in a hard place, I see them come together and they pay bills, they take care of their homes, they do their yard work, they get their groceries, they help with their kids. I mean incredible love of Jesus on display. I see it with serve teams whose sole mission is to go and serve other people. When somebody on their team is in need, they turn and they serve themselves the same ways, helping each other, serving each other, practically taking care of each other's needs. I see it with leaders around here, giving their lives for the people that they serve, laying their lives down, giving up their time, giving up their preferences, doing everything they can to invest in and protect and serve the people that they are leading. And I see people in this family loving like Jesus. I see them forgive when somebody offends them. I see them serve when they're tired. I see them include when they've been left out. I see them sacrifice without a thank you. I see them love people the way that Jesus does and then I see lost people in their lives are in awe of that.

And they're drawn to it. That's powerful. It's one of the most inspiring things you can do. Because do you realize like one of the great honors of your life is that as a follower of Jesus you represent Jesus? Collectively, we're the body of Jesus, but we only represent him accurately through love because that's who he is. So can I ask you this question? Like it's a question that I've had to ask myself over and over and over lately. Are you doing that? Am I doing that? Is what's happening around here putting a display of Jesus that's drawing people to him? Because I want you to imagine this, imagine if this was on display around here all the time.

Imagine if this is how we were loving each other all the time, if we were being patient and kind no matter what was happening around here, if we weren't boasting, if we weren't just -- we're not being rude on social media and a text to each other, right, just not being rude, if we weren't easily angered, if we didn't keep records of any of the wrongs people did to us, if we protected, we were trusting, we were hopeful, we were persevering, if we weren't failing even when somebody else was. Can you imagine the Jesus that that would put on display to the world around us even to ourselves what we would be reminded of, the hope that people could receive? That's incredible. That's what Jesus invites us to because that's exactly what he's done for us. But here's the thing. I know it's been a hard season. I know maybe you don't feel loved. I know maybe you don't feel loving. But Jesus says, hey, "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, love one another. By this, everyone's going to know, you are my disciples, if you love one another." And so we pray that we would love each other the way Jesus loves us. By this, the world will know that we're his disciples, we're his people, we're his church and they will have hope for something that is better and different than what the world has to offer. So would you do this? Would you close your eyes with me?



Let me ask you this question. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you? See, Jesus is inviting us to live free in love, freely receiving and freely releasing. So maybe there's an area of your life right now that you have never let the love of Jesus in, thinking there's no way he could show me love there too, and he says, I want to love you to the end, to the full extent. Could you let the love of Jesus come into your life? Jesus, I thank you for the love that you have for us. May we know and rely on that love. May we receive that love. Jesus, thank you for loving us in a language that we can hear in every way holding nothing back.

May that love flow in and may it flow out. May we truly be known by our love. May we put you on display every day and may we be reminded of who you are, who we are and how much you love us and may the world find hope that that love is there for them too. We thank you, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.