

SERMON SERIES: FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT: LOVE, SUNDAY JULY 6TH 2026

“Love, No Matter What” based on Jonah 3:1-10; Gal. 5:13-26; John 13:31-38

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Some time ago, I was scrolling through social media and came across a video about a woman who had adopted a cat. But this wasn't the typical heartwarming adoption story. From the very beginning, the cat was fearful and aggressive. Perhaps it had been abused by a previous owner, or perhaps it had simply never learned to trust people. It would hiss at visitors and sometimes even lunge at them to drive them away. Because of that, her friends kept asking, "Why don't you just return the cat to the shelter?"

Her answer was simple, but deeply moving. She said something like this, "I made a decision to love this cat—with all of its fears, wounds, and baggage. I'm committed to caring for it and showing it what love looks like, even if I never receive that love in return." She also knew that if she gave the cat back, its chances of being adopted again would be very small. Most people would only see its difficult behaviour and decide it wasn't worth the trouble.

So she chose to live with the inconvenience. She accepted the scratches, the hissing, and the slow progress, because she believed the cat deserved a home where it would be loved for who it was, not abandoned because of its behaviour. That kind of love is costly. It is a love that chooses commitment over convenience, grace over rejection, and faithfulness over comfort.

Friends in Christ, for those of you who have experience of falling in love, might aware that love can be simple, and it also can be complicated. But thankfully the love that the Bible teaches us is a love that is different from what the world teaches us. From the Bible, we learn of a love with no conditions—and a God who loves us so much that He sent love in human form – God's only son, Jesus Christ—to teach us of what real love means and what love does.

Love itself is the very essence of the Gospels, and Jesus Christ is our model for how to love. Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught that the greatest commandment was to love God, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

And throughout our readings today, the book of Jonah in the OT, the Gospel of John, and the Epistle to the Galatians, we want to learn about what love truly is and what love does, especially in this broken world that sometimes full of hatred, anxiety and many other things that ruin the essence of love.

Now let's start with Jonah. Jonah's story is a familiar one for many. Jonah is one of God's prophets who tries to run away from God's calling. Usually, the preachers who preach on this passage, focus on the message of how we are not supposed to run away from what God calls us to do.

However, when I read the book of Jonah a couple times, I sensed two other important things that we can learn from the whole story.

First, when we read what God wants Jonah to do, we can see God's great love for God's people—even those who do evil. The God that, oftentimes, is portrayed as full of wrath, and ready to punish those who do wrong, is portrayed in the Book of Jonah as a God who wants to give people a chance – a faithful and forgiving God who, at the end of the story, relented and forgave the people who repent.

God relented and saved the whole city of Nineveh. Isn't it wonderful? Here we see love overcame anger. The people of Nineveh saved and didn't need to suffer even though their way of life hurt God's heart at one point.

At the same time, we get another message from this story. It shows us how Jonah, as a human, expresses a very human behavior. He judged the people of Nineveh from his own understanding. Jonah knew the Law and the command to love, but he struggled to put that into action when it came to the people of Nineveh. And when asked to help them, he didn't want to. He knew they were wicked and most likely wanted them to be punished.

Here we see that it is easy to talk about love but much more difficult to put into practice, with some people particularly more than others. There are people who are difficult to love, people we don't like, people who are grumpy or hurting, like that cat, who lash out and try to hurt people who approached them. It's hard to love some people—and perhaps even harder to accept that God loves them and wants to give them a chance. Most of us can probably identify ourselves with Jonah here more than we thought we would!

And if we move to the Gospel reading from John, we see the commandment that Jesus gave his followers before his crucifixion.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

This seems to be plain and simple enough when we first read it. Because it is a commandment to love our fellow humans. However, if we understand the context of these words, I believe, the command becomes a whole lot more difficult to follow.

Jesus says this to his disciples when he is about to be killed. On this very challenging time, Jesus asked them to remember to love others so people can know that they are his disciples. You might now wonder how could they love those who killed Jesus? How could they love those who tortured their friend and teacher, who mocked Jesus in front of their eyes?

We might ask, why does Jesus command them to love when he knows how difficult it would be?

This moment I believe, is used by Jesus to show the disciples then, and us now, that no matter how bad the situation we are facing is, no matter how bad the people around us treat us, and no matter how we might think they are not worth our love, we know what Jesus would have us do. To love. To forgive. To humbly leave behind all the reasons we don't want to love them. And put forward the reasons why we should love them instead.

If we were to read a bit further in this Gospel, we would get to the part where Jesus gets up from the table to wash the feet of his disciples. Truly here, John wants to show us that the love of Jesus is more than just words, it is demonstrated through action. Jesus' love means becoming a servant to others. It means caring for people in very practical ways.

Jesus very clearly invites His disciples to follow His example. He says, *"Just as I have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."* Think about who was in that room. According to John's Gospel, Jesus even washed the feet of Judas Iscariot, fully knowing that Judas would soon betray Him. Jesus did not withhold His love or His service because He knew what Judas was about to do.

By washing His disciples' feet, Jesus performed a literal act of service, but it also became a powerful symbol of humility. The Lord of all humbled Himself and took the place of a servant.

That is the invitation Jesus extends to us. We are called to do the same—not necessarily by literally washing one another's feet every day, but by living with the same servant-hearted humility. Instead of seeking to be served, we are called to serve. Instead of acting as though we are superior, we are called to humble ourselves.

Now, imagine Jesus said to you and to me, “Just as I loved you—no matter what your background was, no matter how bad you are in the past, or even until now—please do love your neighbors, friends, families, and, even your enemies.”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, there is a reason love comes first in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Love is not only the greatest commandment and the most important thing of all, but it contains all the other fruit as well.

In addition of what he wrote in his letter to the people in Galatia, we can see Paul’s beautiful description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, where he writes: *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is 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.”*

Friends, starting this Sunday, we will together learn each week about each fruit of the spirit as written in Galatians. And the fruit of the Spirit as a whole is all about growing more like Jesus. When we become Christian, God gives us the Holy Spirit to help us and change us, from our old way of life. The fruits of the Spirit are a beautiful picture of what it means to be more like Jesus. And God wants our lives to reflect that beautiful picture. Starting with love.

The fruit of love has to do with our attitude towards God, toward ourselves, towards other people and beyond that towards all creation. We sometimes think of love as just a feeling, the butterfly in a stomach or weak in the knees when we fall in love. But the Bible says love is both a command and a choice. That means we should choose to love other people even when we don’t feel like it. We are asked to love the way that woman in the illustration loved her cat, to love no matter what, to love unconditionally.

Me myself still struggling in this. And as Jesus give this command to love, I believe He also grant us help through the Holy Spirit to be able to do this. Because if we only relying on our own strength, we will fail eventually. Because our human nature is full of judgement, selfishness, and tend to put our interest first. But with The Spirit that is indwelling within us, we are called to be different. The question now, do we want to do better on loving others?

Friends, love is often spoken and not often lived. We may not be able to love as perfect as Christ loves, but the more we celebrate Christ’s love, grace and mercy in our lives, the more the reality of it all soaks into our hearts, and the more we will love others as ourselves.

Amen.