

Series: I'm In

Sermon: The J.O.Y. of serving others

Text: John 13.34-35

MPT: love for others is a response to Christ's love, the core of the Christian ethic, and an announcement to the world of our allegiance to Christ.

MPS: Loving others FROM Christ's love for you is the path to J.O.Y.

Good Morning! Happy New Year and Happy New Decade. I think I speak for all of us when I say its 2020...where is my jetpack? Instead of using technology to help me fly to work, my kids tell Alexa to make fart noises. Not exactly the Jetson's.

Real quick I want to remind our members about our member meeting this afternoon at our Providence Rd Campus. We are a congregational church. Which means we believe God's spirit resides in every believer and that when we EACH go before God at the same time to ask his direction on the same thing, he will move through us collectively. So we've been praying as members for God to affirm the deacon and elder candidates we presented to you last month. Today we vote on those candidates. That's a big, big deal for our church. If you are a guest listen I just want you to hear that we do not take leadership of a church lightly. It's a sobering task and one that must be approached with great care. Anyways I hope you will be there.

As the new year sets in it's a pretty great time for sports fans. There's still one college football game left, NFL playoffs are getting underway, and basketball is in full swing. I am a UNC grad and my dad was as well. He took me to a few games growing up and ya'll every time I walked into the dean dome...that moment where you pass through the tunnel and into the arena...man I said dad "One day I'm going to play here." I used to dream about crossing over some loser defender wearing a duke jersey and stepping back and dropping a 3. Then as I jogged back down the court Michael Jordan would be in the 3rd row. He'd point at me like I am his heir apparent and I'd remain cool and collected and point back to him. Cause I had just broken his scoring record and it's a big moment.

But then I wised up. As I went through high school I never really grew into that dream. So I stayed in the stands. As do most high school athletes. According to the 1% of high school basketball players will play at D1 level. And 1.2% of those will play professionally. So the typical stadium is filled with 10 guys in desperate need of rest surrounded by 10,000 people in desperate need of exercise.

Sadly, for many Christians this is how they view their Christian life. Maybe they don't think their good enough at ministry, they don't have the training, or personality, or maybe they've just gotten too comfortable in the stands.

But the reality is there are no stands in the Christian life. No spots where you can just sit and watch and avoid the action

yourself. There are no sidelines. Ready or not, you are in the game.

God did not design the church to be a spectator sport. We are each supposed to be in the game, using the gifts God has given to us, sacrificing ourselves to bring success to the team. And the time has come for us to step off the sidelines. Over the next four weeks we are going to really dig into what God says it looks like for us to be “In.” We are going to come face to face with Jesus’ own words about what he called the Christian life to really be. We make a big deal around here about saying we want to bring a gospel awakening to Charlotte but my question in this series is do we make a big deal about BRINGING a gospel awakening to Charlotte.

In this series called “I’m In” we’ll look at how the gospel empowers us to live fully committed to Christ. We’ll see the roots of our hesitancy, the cost of discipleship, and the powerful God-designed support group for strengthening our faith called the church. The title of the series is the action step as well. It’s a call to a gospel-rooted faith that creates a joy-filled commitment to God that responds to his calling like the player who can’t wait to have his number called. I want to create the opportunity for you to Go to God and say “I’m in.”

John 13 is our starting point. We are going to be primarily in John 13 through 17 for this series. Which by the way, this series will go through the month of January. So if you are new to church let me challenge you this way: I want to challenge you to dive in here with us for one month. I’m talking be here all 4 Sundays. Even attend starting point where you learn more about us. it usually takes a few weeks anyways to get a

good feel for a church anyways. At the end of it mercy may not be for you and that’s fine. At the very least you’ll have a pretty full teaching of what “I’m in” means in the Christian life and you can carry that with you wherever.

John 13. Two verses are going to guide our time today. Verses 34 and 35. Jesus’ words to his disciples:

34 “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” -- John 13:34-35 (CSB)

These two verses are not isolated in this passage of course. I’m not plucking them out to make a point. In reality, they are like the first peak in a majestic mountain range of Jesus’ teaching in the gospel of John. These chapters contain the longest extended teaching of Jesus anywhere in the four gospels. They really are a crescendo of sorts of all of his teaching. And these two verses are the summary of what he’s taught his disciples in the entire chapter. You’ll see that in a second. These words confront spectator Christianity in an unexpected way. They go down to the root of WHY we stay on the sideline. Maybe you’ve heard before that you should be “In.” Part of today will be putting words to what keeps us on the sideline. To understanding our own hesitations and then seeing how Jesus shows us not just another way, but a better way to think about following him.

Ok verse 34. Let’s go phrase by phrase. I give you a new command: Love one another

Jesus is sitting with his disciples and he's trying to prepare them for his time on earth to come to an end. He's going to go, be crucified for their sins and then he's going to rise from the dead and go be with the father in heaven. That's the foot of the mountain that is John 13. That's the trailhead...

Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. -- John 13:1

See this section even opens with an allusion to where Christ's whole story is heading. And look at the word choice. He LOVED them to the end. And what I want you to hear right now is that the mountain range...the grand overarching narrative that should take your breath away when you see it is an announcement that the God of the bible loves you. That he loved all of the disciples with him INCLUDING Judas, sitting at the table with him right here. He loved them as he was betrayed. He loved them as he was whipped and beaten. He loved them as he was stripped and brutally paraded in a death march to Calvary. he loved them as the nails went into his hands and feet. He loved them as the cross was set into the ground and he was left to hang until dead. He cried out in agony for the God the father to forgive the very people who were murdering him. In love he went to the cross knowing you and I deserved to be there for our sin. In love he hung there IN OUR place. Because he loved us he didn't let us die for our sin. The sinless took the shame of our sin on the cross. And as he breathed out his last breath...he loved us. And this is the

message of the gospel. God loves you. He created you to know him and to experience that love. To find your identity, your security, and your purpose based out of his love for you. You and I ran from that. We rejected him. And the bible calls that rejection sin. It's choosing other things to try and find a home in. But we never will. And our search for true happiness in all those things is evidence we were made for to find it in God!

Blaise Pascal in 1660s said it this way

"What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself." ¹

And I'm telling you here at the start of this series that the LOVE OF GOD is FOR YOU. It is offered to you and only in the love of God will you ever find your true soul's rest. And you cannot get in the game...you can't say "I'm in" for his purpose for your life until you say "I'm in" to what he did FOR YOU. See every other religion will tell you to give before you can receive. Give your time, talent, and treasure, and then you will receive blessing from God. But Christianity says you must receive before you can ever give. Receive what God has done for you. Rest your soul in it. Find contentment there. AND THEN, give from there. And you have to understand THE

¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* VII(425)

COMMAND Jesus gives in verse 34 is based in the LOVE of God FOR you in verse 1.

Back to verse 34. A new command I give to you love one another.

What strikes me is what makes this new? I mean the Old Testament is FILLED with this command. Leviticus 19.18 "Love your neighbor as yourself." The Entire 10 commandments is predicated on a love for God and for others. So how is this new?

First, new might be better understood as in the word "Fresh" than in the word "different." In other words, Jesus is breathing fresh life and even more understanding to a command of God. He's not invalidating an old command. Think of it as bringing something into color that was once only seen in black and white. How it's new is seen in the next thing he says. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another.

The manner in which these guys sitting around the table were to love one another was now to be based on the way Christ loved them. Not just...love your neighbor as yourself. Your perspective is no longer...well I should treat them the way I would want to be treated. No, it's I must treat them the way Christ treated me. And you gotta think about what JUST happened...

As he's saying this, their feet are probably still a little damp from where Jesus had just gotten down on his hands and knees and washed their feet. Footwashing is a gross thing. Thursday night I had my first experience with a pedicure.

Guys, don't knock it till you try it. But I felt awful for this technician because Courtney says I have dinosaur toes. And I was like man, I know I'm paying for this...and you are a professional whose probably seen worse...but still. Here they are...and I'm sorry. And here is Jesus, THEIR LORD & TEACHER...getting down and washing their nasty feet? And he says...

14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you. -- John 13:14-15

In terms of the mountain of John 13, this is a big lookout. Because he's *introducing* them to the kind of love that he is going to show them in full. Footwashing isn't the point. It's who is doing it that's the point.

In fact, the whole footwashing thing is a metaphor for an even more sacrificial, others-first act he's going to do. Simon Peter said Jesus you can't wash my feet, you are my master. And Jesus said no no, if I don't wash you, you have no place with me. The washing of the feet was a metaphor for the spiritual washing Jesus would do to each sinner by cleansing their record of sin. John 15 we'll look at in a couple of weeks he says greater love has no one than this...that one lay down his LIFE for his friends.

And before you can LOVE like Christ loved...before you can wash feet... you need to receive his love. You need to receive his washing. Ya'll listen right here in the middle of this sermon this is why we insist on being a gospel centered church.

Because the gospel is not just the front door to the Christian house. You don't just walk through it and then start trying to live a moral life. That is the kind of life that EXHAUSTS people spiritually. The Gospel is THE WHOLE HOUSE. And everything God calls you to do...every command...gets its motivation in what Christ has DONE for you. This series I'm calling you off the sidelines. To commit yourself to God and say "I'm in." And it's going to come with action steps. I'd be a foolish, poor shepherd if I didn't make it clear how you can live out your faith in our context.

BUT...the most exhausted people I know are the ones who keep TRYING to DO for God without constantly abiding in what he has DONE for them. Here's a sneak peek at the John 15 mountaintop we'll hit next week

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. -- John 15:5

If you don't remain...if you don't actively consider & take hold of what Christ has done for you...then you can't do anything! You can't drive fuel, you can't bake without heat, and you can't live the Christian life without the gospel. You will exhaust yourself because you'll be trying to love others from a place of sheer will power. And you were created to receive love and then love others from an overflow of your own supply. This is the new command. It's so simple a child can understand it, and yet so profound we will never fully be able to live it out.

But as we humble ourselves and live for others out of his love for us, he says here is what will happen

35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35

Francis Schaeffer who wrote a book called the church at the end of the 20th century talked about how powerful this teaching is from Jesus. Especially as people are less and less interested in attending church services. And I think what he had to say rings even more true now.

"But after we have done our best to communicate to a lost world, still we must never forget that the final apologetic which Jesus gave is the observable love of Christians for true Christians."²

In short, I can preach until I'm blue in the face. And you can talk to everyone about Jesus. But until we actually live out this love for one another. Until this church is a community who visibly, every single one of us, visibly demonstrate others first sacrificial love for one another, the world can't be sure we actually follow Jesus. this love manifests itself so many different ways. But it is most certainly a love that acts. About 10 years ago now I was helping with set-up & tear down for the church I was serving at. I think our arrival time was 5:45am. So to my brothers and sisters at our Independence Campus, I FEEL YOU! Anyways, there was this woman who was a member of our church and he kept bringing his husband

² Schaeffer, Francis. *The mark of a Christian* (Downers Grove, IL IVP 1970)

Gordon. And Gordon served on the tear down team but he wasn't a Christian. Was skeptical of us. But the more he was around us, the more he saw us serving one another with joy...the more he couldn't make sense of us. He was expecting judgy people but he found grace-filled, self sacrificing people who stayed til 2 in the afternoon putting kids equipment & A/V equipment into shipping containers because it was one thing we could do to help people hear the gospel. And he gave his life to Christ one afternoon during tear down. And that's how God has set this whole human experience up. For people to get around genuine Christians and observe a love they've never seen before.

I want to get practical with how we, here in 2020, can put this command of Christ into practice with one another here at Mercy Church. How we can make our "I'm in" commitment to God meaningful. I want to give you a prayer to pray each morning for the rest of January to help you practice this. Then I'll give us a couple of action steps.

For the daily prayer, I want to actually use a tool my kids taught me to help this stick with you. I'm not normally one for acronyms but this one was super helpful. They said if you want to experience JOY as you actively sacrifice yourself for others...think of the word like this

J. – Jesus First: Rehearse the gospel over yourself each morning. Remember what he has done for you, what he has said about you. His promises to you. He has redeemed you, his spirit is with you now, and you have an incredible love you didn't deserve. Consider Memorizing **1 John 3.16 - 16 This is**

how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. - 1 John 3:16

You have ALL YOU NEED for joy today in Christ!! In what he has done for you. No matter what comes today. If my girlfriend dumps me, my boss fires me, my family blows up, ANOTHER appliance breaks in my home, my roommate eats my food clearly labeled in the fridge....I can still have JOY. Because in CHRIST ALONE my hope is found. He is my light my strength my song. ONLY Jesus. ONLY Jesus. We sing this all the time and we sing it for a reason!!

O. – Others Second: Spend your energy looking to meet the needs of others. How can you provide for a fellow brother or sister in Christ? The rest of 1 John 3.16-18 reads like this: **16 This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him — how does God's love reside in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth. -- 1 John 3:16-18**

The hardest thing in the world is to ACTUALLY put others before ourselves. Leads me right to the last part of the acronym.

Y. – Yourself Last: Tim Keller calls this the freedom of self-forgetfulness. It's that the secret to finding joy in this life is removing yourself from the center of it and replacing you with Jesus. Then following Jesus into the service of the needs of others. It's not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself

less. Not being consumed by your own problems and issues so much.

This will only be possible if we believe God is looking after us. Taking care of our needs. So you really don't have to sweat thinking about you. That's covered. And instead, you give your life away. And listen this is a simple idea that will revolutionize your life Jesus says: giving your life away is the only way you will find true life.

So I challenge you to pray each morning "God I desire JOY in you today. Help me see Jesus first, Others second, and myself last."

And The spelling is important. You can't spell joy another way. A lot of Christians want to think they do this already but in actuality they spell Joy Y.O.J. I'm first, others are second, and I'll talk to Jesus when I have time. You will exhaust...YOU. You need to be free of YOU. Your terribly exhausting as the main focus of your life. Get off the throne for your own good! My tendency is to spell JOY... YJO. I think about me and Jesus but not the needs of others. That's profoundly problematic because love is to be action, not just speech. And I speak for a living. And if I stay in that kind of a place too long I end up practicing a joyless Christianity. And there is nothing good for me there. Some of you are more inclined to the needs of others. But if you don't put Jesus first, you are going to die inside. And eventually just go bitter towards the world. Because you'll give and give but since you aren't receiving from Christ...your tank will go empty.

SO here's the prayer. "God I desire JOY in you today. Help me see Jesus first, Others second, and myself last."

Then here's what we do with it:

Believe & be Baptized! - Maybe you've never put Jesus first. You need to start there. And your step of saying "I'm in" is going to be saying I believe. We baptize at the end of every month and maybe that's your step. Come talk with us after service about that. But every month last year that happened and I believe God is bringing some of you to that decision point today.

Jesus told them to serve one another...so **Wash some feet** – Listen one of the things I find really important but often overlooked is how Jesus didn't call them to go take a spiritual gifts inventory online and wait on a role in the upper room to appear and THEN to serve. He called them ALL to a task anyone can do. So I want to call you to the same thing. The command of Christ is very specific to how you are serving other brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

- **Start in your home!** Whether it's a spouse, children, parent, roommate...start there and start looking for ways you can sacrificially serve them. What needs can you meet?
- **Get on a ministry team here at Mercy Church.** Mercy is 4 years old which usually means in the life of a church there is a committed core group of people and many people looking and wondering if there is a place for them here. Don't let that be you. This month we are going to give you the chance to join up on a ministry team. Yes, our ministries are in need of

people...but more than that...YOU NEED to serve others because God calls you to. Weekend teams are a good place to start, but we've got other teams as well. You just put your yes on the table.

- **Get in a community group** – It's hard to serve brothers and sisters if you don't know what it is they need. For many this is your I'm IN this year. We have several groups launching and here's why – You need some people. We will talk more about the power of community in the last 2 sermons this series but it's the context where your ministry has the most power.

On Friday night Courtney and the kids were driving home from Asheville with her mom. They'd gone for a fun day trip and they were about an hour away when they got 2 flat tires. And half way between here and Asheville is ABSOLUTELY nothing. Well because there are 6 in the car, AAA can't take them anywhere. So, I gotta go get em. But the 6 can't fit in my car either. So I'm scrambling and Pastor Rashard says hey man, take my van. What's mine is yours. He didn't flinch. Now is letting me borrow a van for a few hours a LIFE altering sacrifice? No. But his readiness to meet a need...man that SHOWED me the Jesus that man preaches.

CLOSING – Communion. Jesus first.