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Pastor Mark Toone  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *Cram Session: Jesus' Parting Words – Beware!*

John 15:18-16:4

When I mention "the worst advertisements ever," what comes to mind for you? You know... the sort of commercial that is so bad, you love to hate it? In the spirit of Bluegrass Sunday, here's one of my nominations. [Mattress Ranch] It must work, but every time I see it I think, "That has got to be one of the worst sales pitches ever."

And then you turn to this morning's teaching from Jesus and you say, "No... that's the worst sales pitch ever." If you were thinking about becoming a Christian and then you heard Jesus make this speech... well, you be the judge.

[Read John 15:18-16:4]

See what I mean? If Jesus was trying to recruit followers, this is the lousiest elevator speech of all time. And it really jolts, because it follows on the heels of last week's "I am the vine, you are the branches" sermon. Listen again to the end of that passage:

*15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.*

For every person who ever stood on the playground, waiting to be chosen for someone's team, how great is it to hear that Jesus has chosen you for His team. And that your efforts will make a difference—will bear fruit—and that you will be part of a loving community! Who wouldn't want to be part of a group like that?

Then the next verse smacks you right between the eyes: *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*

"Hate" is a jarring word, isn't it? ...especially on the lips of Jesus. It's so extreme. We live in a day when one of the worst things you can be accused of is hate speech. Some moms won't even let their kids say the word. Yet Jesus warns us we will be objects, not just of hate speech but of real hatred. "If the world hated me, it will hate you." This passage is especially jolting because it comes in the

same gospel as John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..." God loves the world and sends his Son. The world hates the Son and kills him, hates the Father who sent him and hates anyone that follows Him. Wow!

Of course, sometimes the world hates us because we act like jerks. Superior and judgmental and arrogant and sticks-in-the-mud... that's not hard to despise. But that's not what Jesus is talking about. He goes on to paint a bleak picture of what lies ahead for the disciples. Their own religious leaders will turn on them. They will be kicked out of their own synagogues. And it will get so bad that radicals will kill them and believe they are doing God a favor. In other words, Jesus is saying, "Beware! The world system is threatened by you and will try to shut you up and shut you down. So don't be surprised when that happens!"

When we read these words in safe Gig Harbor where we march in the parade and display our church name to the community, we might be tempted to think, "This is an interesting historical commentary. The Romans were brutal to the Christians. 11 of the 12 apostles listening to Jesus were martyred, so his warning certainly applied to them, but what does this say to us today? This doesn't seem very relevant, honestly."

Well, maybe not in Gig Harbor or the US but 14 year old Deborah Wakai might disagree. Her father Peter, pastor of a Christian church in northern Nigeria, and her brother Caleb—along with 40 of their parishioners—were killed when their church was attacked during Christmas services last December. Peter and Caleb were murdered in a very gruesome manner, and Deborah was tied between their bodies and forced to remain there all night. "If the world hates me, it will hate you, too."

As a matter of fact, there are way more Christian martyrs today than in ancient times. Every year more than 105,000 Christians around the world die for their faith. During this hour of worship, 12 more people will be killed because they follow Jesus. There are illegal churches that, because they cannot risk being heard, whisper the hymns without a note of music coming from their mouths. It is only by the providence of God that we live in a country that protects our liberties and allows us to meet openly and sing raucous bluegrass praise to Jesus. But for millions of our brothers and sisters around the world, Jesus' words are not an interesting historical footnote; they are a very present reality.

But I would go further: we are foolish if we do not recognize that our own religious liberties are being threatened. Journalists on both ends of the political spectrum have been outraged at the news that the IRS is targeting, among other groups, religious organizations for more punitive treatment. And this last election cycle in our own state which legalized recreational marijuana usage and redefined marriage left hundreds of thousands of us shaking our heads and saying, "What is happening to our society?"

If we think our freedom to proclaim Biblical morality will go unchallenged in the decades to come, we are crazy. One of the things the world hates about Christianity is that we believe in an objective standard of right and wrong. "Who are we to say that anything is right or wrong?" the world asks. "Every person should have the right to decide for themselves." And if you doubt this, go back and re-read some of the newspaper articles from last year when we moved into the EPC, or listen to some of the threatening voice messages I have receive at home. Christianity is no longer the dominant cultural or world view in our country, and as those who despise us gain more strength, confidence and momentum, Jesus' words suddenly sound very relevant.

The world resents the idea that it needs saving. Among those polled in the US who believe in heaven, 85 percent believe they will go there when they die. Even among the self-described "unreligious" people, 79 percent believe that they will go to heaven. The greatest religious delusion in the world is that, by working hard and being better than the next guy, we will rack up enough brownie points to earn God's favor. We don't need a savior. We don't want a savior. But then along comes a savior sent from God with the message, "You cannot save yourself." Our world resents it and comes to despise it.

As a matter of fact, the message of Christ is at conflict with the world in so many different ways. If you want to be first, you must be last. If you want to lead, you must serve. If you want to live, you must die. If you are hated, you must love. The world system is built upon self-preservation, self-promotion, self-gratification. Then Jesus comes along and turns that whole system upside down, and the world doesn't like its system being turned upside down. It resents and despises Jesus and Jesus-followers who dare to stand in opposition.

One of the best-known objects of this scorn is Tim Tebow. Here is a reputable, hard-working, good natured kid with a servant's heart. He is a virgin, he serves on the mission field, he behaves with integrity and sets a great example on and off the field... and I can think of no athlete who has been the object of such ridicule and contempt as Tim Tebow, can you? All the while other athletes who cheat, use steroids and drugs, fornicate with a string of groupies, and care only about their next salary negotiation are celebrated as heroes. How does this sickness make any sense? "If the world hates me, it will hate you, too."

What's the bottom line here? This is not our world. We don't belong here. Not really. And if we get too cozy with this world—if we try too hard to be accepted—we will chase our tails and break our hearts. I never felt like I belonged in high school. I was never one of the cool kids. So imagine my surprise when I got a call asking if I would emcee our ten year high school reunion. I couldn't believe it. And even at the age of 27, I found myself thinking, "Wow! Maybe I will finally be 'in'... maybe I am cool after all." So, excited for the opportunity, I started preparing... only to get this phone call two weeks later. "Yeah, Mark, ummmm... we decided to

ask Gordon Sparks to emcee the reunion—he's funny—but we hope you will still come."

Yeah, right! I never did belong... not really. I still don't. And we don't' really belong here, either. We are not citizens of this world. We are like illegals. We live here, we work here—maybe we even have our green cards—but we really don't belong here. We are citizens of a different kingdom. For those of you who don't quite fit in at work or at school or in the culture... "Relax," says Jesus. "You don't, but you fit into my world!"

Of course, there is a warning that comes from this passage, too. Here it is: If you never feel at odds with the culture, never experience abuse or ridicule for your faith, never find yourself being "Tebowed"... then that raises a different kind of a question. Is your Christian witness so watered down that no one can tell the difference? Are you so comfortable in this world that you fade right into the background? Do you ever, ever talk about Jesus with people at work or school or in the neighborhood? Is there anything at all about your life that points to the Lord you claim to serve? Someone once posed this question: "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

You know, one of the things that dads are supposed to do is teach their kids to be brave and true... to stand tall, stand for what is right and be ready to face the consequences. That is exactly what Jesus is doing here with his first century disciples and with us, his 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples, too. Like I said at the start, it isn't a very good sales pitch, but Jesus never oversold what it meant to be his disciple. He always warned us to count the cost... and sometimes, it was very costly. Fair warning: sometimes it still is. But it is so worth it. It is so worth it to belong to Jesus and to his people. So beware... be brave, be strong, and be blessed.

## Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
  1. What is the main point of this section of Jesus' teaching? Do you find it unsettling? Why or why not?
  2. What does John mean when he uses the word "world?" "Hate" is pretty strong language. How does that word fit into this text?
  3. Have you ever experienced, because of your faith, the kind of opposition Jesus mentions?
  4. If what Jesus promises is true, how should that affect the way we live?