Hated for Loving **John 15:18-25**
Trinity CRC, March 16, 2025 Rev. Richard J. deLange
John Series

Beloved of God,

When we don't like what we're hearing from certain people, we might try to shut them down instead of engaging in dialogue. One of the tenants of democracy is the free exchange of ideas which is supposed to be a cherished value. We don't want to be a culture that is ruled in Taliban fashion, where anyone who speaks against the approved narrative will be quickly silenced.

However, some people today say that we live in cancel culture. Merriam Webster dictionary says, "Cancel culture is a cultural phenomenon in which an individual thought to have acted or spoken in an unacceptable manner is ostracized, boycotted, shunned or fired, often aided by social media." *Cancel culture* is supported as a tool to stop offensive and harmful behavior, while others find it problematic and toxic because it tries to shut down debate, discussion or disagreement.

Call it what you will, but there were people trying to silence Jesus and oppose him. And Jesus says that they'll do the same to his disciples. Jesus calls these people haters in our reading and calls his disciples to be lovers.

The Haters

Remember, Jesus is giving parting words to his disciples as he himself prepares to go to the cross. Here he says in v.18,

Jn 15:18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

Jesus is talking about genuine haters here; he's not using the English slang word like "You're such a hater." That just means that you won't support someone's opinion or brand or something like that. Jesus' words here are much stronger and more pointed.

To begin, he's not saying the world might hate. The *if* at the beginning of the sentence is more like *since.* The Greek means Jesus is assuming the fact as true. The world does in fact hate me and it will also hate you. The word carries in it the idea of detest but also going against or opposing. Not just, "I don't like you but I actually oppose you and what you stand for." Even, "I consider you an enemy."

But who is Jesus talking about here? Does he mean the world as in the universe hates him? Does he mean the world as in planet earth? Does he mean all the people on earth? Does he mean the spirit of ungodliness as when someone might say to us, "You're acting in a worldly manner?" Zooming in on the text, it seems that Jesus is speaking first and foremost about the Jews who don't believe in him. He talks in v.20 specifically about those who persecuted him, which would be the Jewish religious leaders. They are the world, it seems.

This "world" represents those who don't and won't believe that Jesus is the Messiah, sent by God the Father. They have made themselves enemies of God by hating

the very One he promised to them for hundreds of years and the very one who is now present—sent by him. These are people like the Apostle Paul before he became a Christian. As Saul, he hated everything to do with Jesus and opposed it, even zealously going out to persecute and kill Christians. It was intense hatred.

I think it's safe to say that we don't really know that kind of hatred so much in our society. We hear about individual believers or groups of Christians being killed by extremists like Boko Haram far away in Nigeria or sent to prison in North Korea. We might even know that there are millions of Christians living in places where they are not free to worship Jesus. In some places they are killed but often they are marginalized—they can't get good jobs or they get kicked out of their family. Unbelievers can hate and do violence to those who believe in Jesus. The Bible even tells us that we shouldn't be surprised when that happens. Jesus says here, "if they hated me, they'll hate you!"

Do we experience hatred for following Jesus? I don't think we know hatred that ends in murder like many in our world know it. But are there ways we are hated in Canada because of our faith in Jesus? Because of where our denomination is at and the discussions and debates we've had around sexuality, it's probably safe to say that some in our society might hate us for saying things like unchastity includes the use of pornography, bestiality, polygamy, same-sex sex, premarital sex and other things the church has traditionally called unchastity. However, our modern society has become very promiscuous and thinks it's fine for people to have premarital sex, to have multiply sex partners, to have sex with anyone who wants to have sex with you. You should be free to "love" whoever you want, whenever you want and however you want. So, if we say we are against those things because God says that isn't a good way for us, we might be hated. And when we say, such living also isn't good for our society, some people will hate us for believing that. Even then, we aren't likely to know the extreme hatred Jesus is speaking about in John 15, the kind of hatred that leads people to kill believers in Jesus.

But let's think about this another way. People in our society, I would say, are more apt to hate us today because of how we disdain those who do certain things we consider sinful. People might sense our hatred for those we consider sinners instead of our love. And that's a problem. Be honest. Have you looked at a drag queen in a parade and thought, "That person is disgusting!"? Have you watched lesbians holding hands in the mall or maybe kissing on TV and thought, "That is sick!"? Have you read about two women and one man living in a marriage-type of relationship and rolled your eyes thinking, "What is wrong with those people?" Maybe you've even questioned the sincerity of the faith of a Christian who is same-sex attracted and living a celibate life.

Let's just be clear that it is understandable for the world to hate us when we think, act or speak like that. And what's more, I would say that God hates such attitudes as well. You see, in our passion to uphold the 7th commandment, we transgress the 6th. So the world hates us for being mean and judgmental. And we need to repent of that.

My friend and fellow pastor Peter came out as same-sex attracted in 2017. He had praise for his congregation who accepted him and his struggle. He wrote, "My church lived out this section of the 1973 Report (The CRC's first report on same-sex attraction which said,) *Within this fellowship of love* [referring to the church] *the homosexual who*

*has also been justified and sanctified by Christ must be accepted in his homosexuality, so that **in** the congregation he does not need to wear a mask and conduct himself like a hypocrite, living in constant fear of discovery and exposure. Nor, when his identity is known, should he receive the painful rejection homosexuals so often experience. He deserves the same acceptance, recognition, compassion and help that is given to any person.* Those were pastoral words for all of us, written 50 years ago. Even though our synod said that acting on such desires was sinful, simply having them is not. In fact, we should support those who come out and need the safety and love of a church. They need support, not condemnation or rejection or looks of disgust and distrust.

While Peter experienced loving support from some, he also lamented how he felt rejected. He said, "Language used about me and other gay people has also caused a lot of pain…. I have been called a lot of derogatory things by people within the CRC. I have been called an abomination, unbiblical, a groomer, cursed, a danger to kids, gross, promoting a non-Christian lifestyle, etc. I kept on trying to remind myself that these things were often stirred up by cultural debates and media, but it left painful marks."

Peter reminds us, "The Heidelberg Catechism on the 6th commandment says, *I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds—and I am not to be party to this in others. By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly toward them, to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.* If we were actually focused on being confessional we would be focused on how we continually break the 6th commandment in our language concerning gay people. Language can do incredible harm to one's faith and wellbeing. We cannot say that we need to follow the confessions on the 7th commandment and ignore the 6th commandment."

Peter is so right. This brother and pastor who deals with same-sex attraction feels the hatred even though he's trying to give the church some grace. So, we can only imagine that people outside of the church who feel disdain from Christians are going to hate the church. But then we've brought it on ourselves because we haven't been loving as Jesus says we must be. We've hated sinners—people—rather than hating just the sin.

You see, Jesus is talking about being hated by the world because we love God, which means we're also supposed to love our neighbours. We can hate sin but we can't hate sinners. When we hate sinners, we're missing out on the fact that we're also sinners and our sin is no less than theirs. So, let's be clear that sometimes believers in Jesus are hated simply because we believe in Jesus; we're hated because we want to live our life the way God says. But when we do not love people who are struggling with sin's affects, but look and act with disgust, then we ourselves are sinning against them and it's not surprising that they might hate us.

Let's simply be clear that Jesus is talking here in John 15 about being hated because we love him, believe in him as our Saviour, and follow him as our Lord. He's not talking about being hated because we are being hateful, even if we might be right about a certain kind of lifestyle.

The Lovers

Our calling from Jesus in this chapter is to love even while we're being hated for believing in him. So, if people hate us because we say, "Jesus is the Way, the truth and life," that's okay. We are holding to the truth of the gospel. But Jesus is calling us to be people who love our neighbours, even when it's hard.

Let's be clear that loving our neighbours doesn't mean simply accepting everything the world says is good. Jesus says in vv.21 & 22 of our passage

> Jn 15:20 Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

that people who are his servants are those who obey his teaching because we know his Father who sent him.

His words in those verses make clear that at least 2 things mark those believers who love properly. First of all, there is faith in God, the one who sent Jesus. Unbelievers may hate us because they do NOT know the One who sent Jesus. That means they don't have faith in God, they don't believe in Jesus as the Messiah. That was the first issue for the Jews who were trying to kill Jesus.

Secondly, they didn't want to obey Jesus' teaching. Why was that? Jesus says, the world doesn't love him and so it won't obey his commands. But, we could argue, if the world is those Jewish leaders, then isn't it true that they were very zealous about obeying God's commands? Well, that depends. You see, Jesus raised the standards of God's law to focus on love. It wasn't good enough to keep the letter of the law. It had to be the spirit of the law because the spirit of the law revolves around love for God and our neighbour. Remember that Jesus said if you only look lustfully at a someone, you are committing adultery in your heart. And if you just call someone a fool, that's a form of murder.

So, when the Jewish leaders had the woman caught in adultery brought to Jesus, they were ready to stone her to death, considering themselves to be holier and more righteous than her by a long shot. She had broken the letter of the law. Thinking they were pleasing God with their obedience to the rules, Jesus moved the discussion a step farther. He showed love both for the woman and for God by offering her grace and forgiveness and then calling her to God's good standard for life: "I do not condemn you," he said, but then added, "now leave your life of sin." It's not loving to say that sin is not sin and leave people to live in that mess. This is the flaw of liberal Christianity.

Love has the two sides of grace and obedience but always grace first. We love people by extending God's grace which provides forgiveness. We offer grace because we've also received it and we are as much in need of it as anyone else. However, receiving grace calls for repentance. And that is followed—sometimes quickly and other times slowly—by thankfulness to God which includes a growing desire to live for him, live our life his way. To obey him. This is how we are to love. We are not looking to condemn; we're looking to help one another live life God's way and we're ready to walk with people on that journey which can be difficult.

Hated for Loving

Friends, the heart of Jesus' teaching here is how we live faithful lives when we are hated for loving. We are in the right place when we are hated for loving. When we are hated for **hating**, that's fair. But being hated for loving is the way of Jesus. This is the hard work of being a disciple. It was true in the first century and it's still true today.

If people are followers of Jesus our resurrected Saviour and Lord, then he calls the shots on our life. With the Holy Spirit's presence in us and his help to do the will of God, we will be servants like our Lord Jesus was. In 1 Peter 2, starting at v.20, we read,

> *1Pet2:20But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*
>
> *22 "He committed no sin,*
> *and no deceit was found in his mouth."*
>
> *23When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." 25For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

Being hated for loving looked like this in the first century: In the early years of the New Testament Church, it was common for Romans who had unwanted babies to leave them outside to die—either from dehydration, exposure to the elements or for wild animals to consume. It was also legal to use babies as sacrifices to their gods. But as Christians began to live out the command to love, they would rescue those babies. They sacrificed their own comfort and their own security for the sake of those in need of rescue. This is the way of the cross, the way of sacrificial love.

When it comes to dealing with matters of sexual sin, I think our synod got it right already 50 years ago. As we already heard, we are called to love those who struggle even while holding that certain behaviour is sinful. That is a constant challenge, isn't it!? Jesus is promising the help of the Holy Spirit in doing good, even if we suffer for that. But this is the challenge of being hated for loving.

If you and I defend someone who is being bullied because of their looks or sexual orientation or anything else, we might face the scorn of the bullies too but then we're hated because we're loving. In loving, we show grace to people, not condemnation. At a later time, if people come to faith in Jesus, then we can help them see how to deal with their sin or their struggles. As a church it's important to have our theology right, of course. But it's equally important to work hard at loving right! Loving even when it's tough or uncomfortable or may cause us to be hated by some people.

Young people, sometimes a student can just get by at school in order to be in the cool group. You might even make snide remarks about the teacher or other students. But

when Jesus is your Lord, you aim to be the best student you can be. That might not mean you're getting straight A's. But it means you're diligent and thoughtful. You aim to bless the teacher and your classmates. If, in doing so, you feel the scorn or hatred of those who think it's cool to bully others, then you've found the sweet spot of being hated for loving.

Say you're a carpenter. You know there are ways to cut corners that might be considered normal. But the spirit of love says, "Build it like it was for yourself. Make it something you'd be proud to have Jesus live in." That may not be the way to make the most money, but loving our neighbour means doing things the right way. If your boss hates you for doing the right thing, that's what Jesus is talking about here.

It's not always black and white. Loving well is hard work. But it's about loving others in the name of Jesus, loving because Jesus has loved us and we are aiming to love others as we've been loved by him. If that leads to hatred or people misunderstanding us, that's okay. Jesus said in v.21,

> *Jn 15:21 They will treat you this way **because of my name**, for they do not know the one who sent me.*

When people don't know our God, don't believe in him, and haven't experienced or known the love of Jesus as we have, then we **can't** really expect them to understand why we love like we do. That's Jesus' reminder to us as we live in our world. Keep loving God's way, even when it's hard.

Remember, followers of Jesus Christ are 'not from the world'. Jesus says in v.19 that we are chosen out of the world. But also remember that this choosing is for a purpose. As someone said, "We are *for* the world—sent into it, as Jesus was, to bear witness to God's love with the values of God's kingdom." Those who follow Jesus will find ourselves at times facing opposition but these are also opportunities to share the way of Jesus. It's good to remember this point: we are chosen to be a blessing to the world, a light in the world, lovers in a world of hate. And we have the 'helper', the **spirit** of truth, from the Father, who is with us. And through our efforts of loving—imperfect as they may be—the Spirit can lead people to find Jesus' love and grace and bring them into the family of God.

Being hated for loving. Think about it. How can we do that well? It is indeed a challenge. But this is the calling of Jesus for our lives and he goes with us.