Lovers, Haters, Helper
John 15:18-16:4

We're in that part of John's gospel that theologians call 'Jesus' farewell discourse.' Jesus knows his death is approaching, that his farewell is coming, and he sets out to prepare his disciples for just that.

Now… when you say goodbye to someone, how do you do it? It depends, doesn't it, on who you're saying goodbye to. If you've just had dinner with friends you might give them a hug and thank them for a lovely evening. But you wouldn't hug your boss at the end of a business meeting, you'd shake his hand. And if it's your class teacher you might just grunt.

But what if it was someone you were really close to, like your girlfriend or boyfriend, your husband, or wife, your parents or kids? Them you might kiss and simply say, 'love you, see you later.'

And as Jesus says goodbye to these men, it is infused with love. But also with the something much darker. As John Calvin says, Jesus is preparing them 'for a struggle.' For a world that's blind to what *true* love really looks like.

And as he prepares them, he prepares us - because we live in the same world. So we're going to look at three things. The Lovers, the Haters, and the Helper. The desire for love, the reality of hate, and the hope of help.

The Lovers and the Desire for Love
Cast your mind back to David's sermon last Sunday, and how Jesus has told these men that he is the true vine, and that they're the branches, and that the secret to living a fruitful life is to abide in him, like a branch stays grafted in a vine.

But then he says something extraordinary: v9, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love."

And Jonathan Edwards, the great 18th Century pastor and theologian, famously described heaven as 'a world of love.' A world these men, and you and me, are invited into. Because as God the Father has loved the Son for all eternity, as that infinite well of the deepest, fondest, most adoring love has flowed from the Father to the Son for all time and before time, so now the Son, Jesus himself, has set that love upon you. That like an engineer redirects the flow of a river, so Jesus has turned the Father's love to us.

'I have loved you', Jesus says. 'So rest, abide, stay, in that love.' And as they do, he says that in turn, they will love each other. Verse 17, "These things I command you, so that you will love one another."

So if heaven is a world of love, Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of love - where the citizens, these disciples, and you and me if you're a Christian, know we are loved by the King and as a result love one another.

And you want to be loved, don't you? On Thursday a number of us were at a talk at the EPFL on ethics in AI and one of presenters, a professor of philosophy who's not a believer talked about the things that help people thrive, that we need in our lives to flourish, and top of the list was, no 1, friendships and no 2, loving relationships. And he's not wrong, is he?

And people describe the need to be loved as being like a hunger, a hole needing to be filled. And for you it might take the form of wanting to be admired, or cherished, or respected, or affirmed, or physically held close, or just to have close friends who know you. But whatever form it takes, deep down, we want the approving gaze of another to fall on us and say, 'I approve of you, I respect you, I love you.'

Which is why what Jesus says next falls with a crash. Verse 18, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."

You see, we can think heaven is a world of love, and Christ is the king of love, and we are to love, and love is going to be met by love. And Jesus says, 'nah, the world doesn't work like that.'

The Haters and The Reality of Hate
Verse 19, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

Now, over the course of history, there have been physical and metaphorical lines of demarcation between people, haven't there. Think the Berlin Wall, or the Iron Curtain, or the Bamboo Curtain, or the demand to 'build the wall'.

Well, here, Jesus also draw a line of demarcation. Between those who are his and those who are of the world. And in his gospel, John uses the word 'world' in multiple different ways. There's the literal, physical world: John 1:10, 'He was in the world, and the world was made through him.' There's the mass of humanity who God loves - John 3:16, 'for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.' There are the crowds turning to Jesus, John 12:19, as the Pharisees say, "Look, the world has gone after him." And there's the mission field Jesus sends his disciples into, John 17:18, "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

But here, when Jesus says "I chose you out of the world," he's talking about humanity in rebellion against God.

Now, last week I went to see my mum in the UK. The problem was my UK passport had expired. Not a problem you might think, go on your Swiss one. Except, the UK government has introduced an entrance fee for foreigners. And I thought, 'I'm not paying to go there.' So I had a choice. Either pay the fee, or renew my passport and get in for free.

Now I know that comparing the United Kingdom to Christ's kingdom is a little dodgy, but we can think entry to that kingdom works the same way. I've made a decision for Christ, I've prayed the prayer, I've got baptised so I've got the passport. Or, my family are Christian, they got the passport for me. Or, I know I'm not perfect, but I'm better than those over there, so I've paid for and got the passport.

No, Jesus says, if you're a Christian it's because "I chose you out of the world." So there is a border, and you cannot cross it, unless out of his grace and love Christ picks you up and lifts you over.

But, Jesus says, that immediately turns the world against you. Why?

Well, have you ever you've heard the expression, 'guilty by association'? There's no evidence against this person, but they know the offender, so they must be guilty. Well, if there is guilt by association, Jesus is saying there's hatred by union. That chosen by him and united to Christ, you're not one of them anymore.

If you *were*, v19, "The world would love you as its own." But you're not. Now, today we hear people say, 'Love is love' until you suggest that it's *not* loving to agree with everyone doing whatever they want, regardless of what they're doing. Because then 'love is love' becomes anything but loving towards anyone who dares challenge those behaviours or ideologies.

I mean, imagine that you're a member of a revolutionary group, one of the armed rebels hiding out in the jungle, pledged together to overthrow the king. But one day you pick up a leaflet dropped by one of the king's planes, calling on you to lay down your arms, and offering a full and free amnesty, and a welcome back into citizenship, and the lifelong provision and protection of the king. And as you read it you realise, you've been brainwashed by rebel propaganda, and that this king is no despot, he wants me as a friend. And so as soon as you can, you escape to the king's side and he proves better than his word and you are welcomed with open arms.

How will your previous comrades-in-arms view you? You're a traitor.

And Jesus is saying, if I will be your king, and you will be my disciple, expect to be hated on account of me. Verse 21, "All these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me." And verse 3, "They will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me."

In other words, they will hate because they've never experienced the love of the Father for themselves. Like a person born blind who's never experienced a sunset and refuses to believe that you have, until you know the soul-melting, hard-heart changing love of God for yourself, something inside will resent those who say they have.

And Jesus says, they hated me first. Because confronted by a man so lovely and so loved by God, antagonism rose up in the hearts of his opponents. Verse 24, "If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father." And Jesus is not saying, 'My fault, if I hadn't come they'd have carried on living their squeaky-clean blameless lives. I should have just let them alone - live and let live ' No, it's that just by being present, and by doing what one loved by the Father does, Jesus has incited that age old enmity against God.

Verse 25, "But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: "They hated me without cause." And he's quoting Psalm 69, where David speaks of a zeal for God's house, and of reproaches against God falling on him, his servant, and of being thirsty, but being given sour wine to drink. And Jesus is saying, that psalm is speaking of me. And if David was hated without cause how much more true is that of great David's greater Son, the true king?

But what's true of me, Jesus is saying, will be true for you. Verse 20, "'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.'"

Now, you almost certainly work long hours. And someone might look at your life and go, 'boy you work hard.' What would you reply? 'Yeh, it goes with the job.' And Jesus is saying, the hatred of the world goes with the Name. His name. So don't be surprised when it comes.

But also, don't be surprised by the form it takes. Because there's hatred and there's persecution, he says. And then in v2, "They will put you out of the synagogues." And, "the hour is coming when whoever *kills you* will think he is offering service to God."

And little has changed has it? I mean, if the apostles were mocked as being unlearned, ignorant men, maybe you get criticised or face snide remarks for believing something so backward.

A few weeks back, Tom gave a talk at the EPFL on humility and, as he put up a couple of Bible verses on the screen, two or three people shut their notebooks, packed their bags, got up and walked out - 'I'm not staying here to listen to this rubbish.'

And if these disciples were put out of the synagogue, maybe you'll be left off an invitation list, or not be short-listed for a job, or get cancelled, excluded, or disinvited. And while you and I are unlikely to be killed for our faith, the same cannot be said for some of our brothers and sisters around the world.

But why do people behave like that? Because, Jesus says, they think they're serving God. And that god might be a religious god, like Judaism, Islam, Hinduism or, nearer to home in years gone by, Catholicism. But it could also be secular. And today you can be criticised, ostracised, and cancelled because you've offended the gods of freedom, sexuality, and identity.

But whatever the god, Jesus is saying, people will think they are doing the right thing. But that god blinds them to the truth and incites hatred, not love, and keeps them from experiencing true love.

But again, the problem is, we want to be loved. None of us want to be hated. Even those so-called influencers who seem to revel in being hated do so because it wins them the admiration of others.

But it's that desire to be loved and liked that makes these disciples, and you and me, vulnerable. Because the worst thing that can happen to you, Jesus says, is not that you're hated, or cancelled, or even killed. It's that you fall away.

Verse 1: "I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away."

You see, if we are called to love, and we are; and if we have this inner need to be loved and liked, which we do; but find ourselves at risk of being hated, it's obvious we're also going to be at risk of compromising. Of watering down what others might find objectionable, or of staying silent, or of fudging what obedience to Jesus looks like. And we find ourselves drifting away from him because the love of the world seems more attractive.

And we never graduate from that risk, do we?

Take Peter as an example, because he was here as Jesus says this. And after Jesus' resurrection, even in the face of hatred, and opposition, and being put out of the synagogue, and being physically

beaten up, he fearlessly and lovingly preached the gospel. Home and dry you might think. No risk of him falling away.

Except, a few years later he finds himself in Antioch, a church of Jews and Gentiles, eating and worshipping together. Until people from what Paul calls in Galatians, 'the circumcision party' pitch up, and start telling the Jewish believers 'you need to separate from these Gentiles.' And Paul's jaw hits the floor when *Peter* does just that.

Why? Is he suddenly convinced of the Biblical case for separation? Has he been persuaded theologically that Jews really are better than Gentiles? No. As Paul says in Galatians 2:12, 'He drew back and separated himself, *fearing* the circumcision party.'

To use Jesus' words, Peter fell away from what he knew to be true because, in that moment, to be approved of by others mattered more to him than the love and grace of Christ.

Great, you might say, but if Peter fell, what chance do I stand? Where am I going to find the courage to stand firm in the face of opposition, or to love in the face of hate?

The Helper and the Hope of Help
Verse 26, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."

In other words, Jesus does not abandon you and leave you trying to stand in your own strength. Instead, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is like a spotlight, fixing his beam on Jesus, bearing witness to him, telling us 'Look at him.' When you feel weak, or others are criticising your faith, and you feel totally inadequate, 'look at him' the Spirit says. When you're feeling the pull of temptation or compromise, and the love of the world seems more real than the love of Christ, look at him. When you're feeling angry or hatred is rising in *your own* heart because of how others are treating you, or because of the damage their doing to others, look at him. Fix your eyes on Christ, the Spirit says.

And he's the Spirit of truth. So he will remind these disciples and you and me of truth. That regardless of what your circumstances, or anyone else says about you, you are loved by the Father. That however insecure you feel, or your future feels, you are secure in him. That when others point out your faults, or tell you you're a hypocrite, the Spirit tells you 'true but Christ died for your sins and you are forgiven, so look on his goodness, not your badness. On his righteousness not your unrighteousness.'

Which is exactly what Paul encourages Peter to do when he stumbles. You see, Paul could have said, 'Peter, you should know better than this and you need to do better than this.' But he doesn't. Instead he says, Peter's conduct 'was not in step with the truth of the gospel' (Gal 2:14).

In other words, Peter didn't need a lecture to try harder. He needed to hear again the truth of the gospel of God's grace and love and undeserved choosing. The gospel that's as true these gentile believers as much as it is for him.

Because as the Spirit reminds us of God's grace to us in Jesus - that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us; that we were loved when *we* were enemies; that we were brought in when *we*

were haters - our self-righteous hatred melts away, and we remember, we are loved by the One whose opinion really matters.

But, if you noticed, the Spirit doesn't just bear witness to us. It's that through these disciples the Spirit will bear witness to the world. Verse 27, "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning."

So will some hate? Yes. But will everyone? No! Verse 20 again, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also."

In other words, take heart. Yes, if you're a Christian, *and you live like one*, in school, on campus, at home, in the work-place, you will face opposition. It goes with the name. But just like you heard, others will hear, and just like you believed, others will believe.

When Luke is recounting Paul's stay in Corinth in the Book of Acts, he doesn't go into the gory details of the opposition Paul faced, except to say he *was* 'opposed and reviled' (Acts 18:6) not least by the members of the local synagogue. But things must have got pretty bad because Luke tells us, 'Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue believed in the Lord, together with his entire household' (Acts 18:8).

And you can imagine how that must have intensified the attacks. Because reading between the lines, Paul was afraid. Afraid enough for the Lord to appear to him in a dream and say, "Do not be afraid, [Paul] but go on speaking and do not be silent, *for I am with you*, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people" (Acts 18:9-10).

In other words, don't quit Paul, don't crumple in the face of the hatred. Don't give way or fall away. I'm with you. And just like I've chosen you out of the world, I've got plenty more to come. So keep going.'

And that promise is the same for us. It's not a promise of comfort or even of physical protection. And it's certainly not a promise that everyone will like you. But it is a promise that the Father loves you. A promise of help and the Helper - of the Spirit of truth bearing witness to Jesus, that he is with us and has many people he's calling to himself.

So, this week, whatever you're facing, follow the beam of the Spirit's spotlight and look to Christ. Know that you are loved - no matter what anything or anyone else is saying. And keep loving as you've been loved.