

Ohana

“Agape Love”

May 11-12

Introduction

Aloha! I’m Mark and I want to welcome you to our service. We are so excited that you are joining us this weekend as we kickoff a brand new series called, *Ohana*. From Mother’s Day to Father’s Day we will learn what Scripture says about abiding in love as Ohana — the family of God.

What does Ohana look like in the Kingdom of God? What does it mean to be part of God’s Ohana? What characteristics mark the family of God? Whether or not you came to Church with your Ohana, the truth is that we are all Ohana so turn to a brother or sister sitting next to you and tell them, “We are Ohana”. Yes! It doesn’t matter if that person is younger or older, lives in a different community, or comes from another country — all of God’s children are one Ohana. Hawaii is one of those special places where we can celebrate the beautiful diversity of God’s Ohana. So how do we live as the Ohana of God? All of us were born into different families. Some good, some not so good. We all come with different pasts, experiences, and even hurts. Each of us was born into a different family. But we are all born again into the same family.

So whether you apply these truths in your home or in your small group with your “Boat Buddies”, let’s discover how to live as God’s Ohana.

The Preeminence of Love

When it comes to being God’s Ohana, there is one value that stands far and above the rest. This value is the cornerstone of who we are and should set us apart from the rest of the world. We find this value from our Founder (Jesus) in scripture.

³⁶ *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*

³⁷ *Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”* ³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.* ³⁹ *And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’* ⁴⁰ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* (Matthew 22:36-40).

Jesus said, if you had to boil everything down to one thing, if we could only talk about one thing, it would be love. Everything hangs on love.

³⁵ *“By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another,”* (John 13:35).

Jesus is saying, “This is the most important thing. If you forget everything else, remember this: Love God and Love one another. If you get that, you’ve got it. Love will be what sets you apart and how people will know that you are My disciples.”

Think about the values that define different companies — that set them apart. See if you can finish these popular slogans.

Nike - “Just Do It” (Nike wants to be known for taking action. Just do it)

Subway - “Eat Fresh” (Subway wants to set itself apart from other fast-food chains with their fresh ingredients)

McDonald’s - “I’m Lovin’ It” (Who doesn’t love McDonald’s French fries or Chicken Nuggets?)

Disney Land - “The Happiest Place on Earth” (Costliest)

But if Christians had a slogan, something that we were known for and set us apart it would be:
Christians - “Love God, Love People”

Even the Apostle Paul agreed that we can possess all of these amazing gifts and talents but if we don’t have love we don’t have anything. We can possess faith, hope, and love but the greatest of these is love. This is what we should be known for. Now, let’s be honest. It’s one thing to have a slogan but it’s another thing to really own it. Sometimes you hear a slogan and think, “Really”? Like, Subway - “Eat Fresh”. Ok, I guess “Fresh” is relative. McDonald’s - “I’m Lovin’ It” Maybe in the moment but a couple hours later and I’m not lovin’ it so much. Disney Land “The Happiest Place on Earth”. Don’t get me started. The lines, the crowds, the prices. United Airlines, you know the one that’s always making headlines for all of the fights and brawling? Their slogan is, “Flying the Friendly Skies”. And it’s easy to laugh but if you think about what we’re supposed to be known for, are we doing any better? Be honest. Do you think the world knows us for our love? We don’t have to wonder.

According to a recent survey, in which over 3,000 adults in America participated, 84% agreed that Jesus was an important spiritual figure.

The survey also asked “What characteristics do you associate with Christians in general?” They were then given words to choose from.

Those who identified as Christians overwhelmingly associated themselves with positive traits:

- 57% Giving
- 56% Compassionate
- 55% Loving

But there was a fundamental disconnect between how Christians saw themselves and how the rest of society saw them. When asked the same question, those who identified as nonreligious selected different words:

- 55% Hypocritical
- 54% Judgmental
- 50% Self-righteous
- Followed by “Arrogant, Unforgiving and Disrespectful”

But Jesus said the world would know us by our love. As the Ohana of God we’ve got a major disconnect on our hands.

Another Kind of Love

Part of the problem could be that we don’t know the kind of love Jesus was talking about. You see, in the English language, we really only have one word for ‘Love’. So I can ‘love’ my wife and I can also ‘love’ pizza. I really ‘love’ Jesus but I also ‘love’ movies. I absolutely ‘love’ my kids and I really ‘love’ to go surfing.

The Greeks in Jesus' day were a little more specific when it came to love. They employed different words for different situations. If they were talking about familial love they would use the word "Storge". If they were talking about loving a friend they would say, "Phileo" (No, not the fish sandwich from McDonalds. Think, Philadelphia "The city of Brotherly Love"). Eros was their word for romantic love (where we get the word "Erotic"). But none of these words capture the essence of the kind of love Jesus is talking about.

When Jesus talks about love, He uses an entirely separate word known as *Agapē*. *Agapē* love is not of this world, it is a divine love modeled to us by God Himself.

⁸ *"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us," (Romans 5:8).*

God does not love the way the world loves. Human love revolves around emotions, feelings, and personal desires. It can be conditional, based on merit or what we can get in return. Human love can fluctuate depending on circumstances or even fade over time. It can be selfish, seeking its own interests and satisfaction. But the Bible tells us that God demonstrates His own love for us. How many of you are thankful that God doesn't love the way we love? God demonstrates His own love. Hallelujah.

God's love is not based on feelings or emotions. It is a conscious decision. God is committed to love us regardless of the circumstances. God's love is selfless. His love always seeks the best of the other person. It is a love that is sacrificial, willing to give up one's own comfort and convenience for the sake of another.

It's enduring: It is not fickle or fleeting, but rather it is steadfast and unchanging. It is a love that remains constant, regardless of our actions or behaviors. Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This verse reminds us of the enduring nature of God's Agape Love for us.

It's a transformative love: It has the power to change hearts and lives. It is a love that brings healing and restoration. It is a love that breaks down barriers and builds bridges. It is a love that fosters unity and harmony. It is a love that compels us to forgive and to seek reconciliation.

It's inclusive: It is not a love that is exclusive or selective, but rather it is a love that embraces all, regardless of race, gender, social status, or background. It is a love that sees beyond the surface and recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every individual.

It's active: It is not a love that is passive or indifferent, but rather it is a love that is engaged and involved. It is a love that compels to action, to serve and to minister to the needs of others.

This is the kind of love that God extends to us. And this is how we are commanded to love one another. We read earlier that this is how the world will know we are Jesus' disciples. But look at the verse before that one

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

How will the world know that we are Jesus' disciples? It is when we love each other with the same love Jesus showed us — Agapē Love.

How to Love Like Jesus

If you're anything like me, you're probably thinking, "Oh sure, no problem, just love like Jesus. The most perfect person to ever live." How do we express this kind of impossible love? Let's read 1 John 4:7-12. Just to help us understand the kind of love we're talking about I replaced our English word for 'Love' with the kind of love the Bible is talking about. It won't be grammatically correct but here we go,

7 "Dear friends, let us Agapē one another, for Agapē comes from God. Everyone who Agapēs has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not Agapē does not know God, because God is Agapē. 9 This is how God showed his Agapē among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is Agapē: not that we Agapēd God, but that he Agapēd us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so Agapēd us, we also ought to Agapē one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we Agapē one another, God lives in us and his Agapē is made complete in us,"
(1 John 4:7-12).

The reason there is such a huge disconnect from the Church and why the world sees us as hypocritical is because often times we profess the love of God but we don't possess the love of God. Many irreligious people know the story of Jesus, they've heard of His love but then they look at the Church and they don't see the same love. We can't profess what we don't possess.

The first thing we have to do is acknowledge that we are powerless to truly Agapē on our own. You and I are not loving people. Agapē love comes from God. Left to our own efforts we will never Agapē others. We need to acknowledge that apart from Him we are powerless to love on our own. This brings us to the second acknowledgement that we need to be born of God. God is love and when God lives in us, His Agapē is made complete in us. Agapē is the fruit of God's Spirit living in us. It is not the result of years of trying or more effort. It is the byproduct of us dying to ourselves and surrendering to God's love flowing through our lives. To know God is to know love. If I don't know God, I won't know how to love. I can't do something I don't know. It's like math. You can't fake it till you make it. Believe I tried. You can't do calculus if you don't know calculus. You can't speak Korean if you don't know Korean. I can't Agapē love if I don't know the One who is love. If you abide in Him and He abides in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from Him we can do nothing.

Conclusion

It's like this fan. This fan is supposed to cool us. With Summer approaching we need more fans. On its own this fan is virtually powerless to cool us. I can wave it around trying to produce enough wind but I'll probably end up hurting someone. This fan cannot generate enough power to do what it needs to on its own. But connected to the right source it can do what it needs to do. The only way for us to love the way we were created to is to know the One who is love.

When I think of drawing on love's source, I think of Corrie ten Boom. Her family had all died in the Nazi concentration camps. Their crime? Hiding Jews in their home. Somehow Corrie survived. The war had ended, the camps had been liberated, and Corrie was speaking in various churches, sharing about God's love and faithfulness, even in the midst of horror. She writes in her best-selling book, "The Hiding Place":

“It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, a former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, [my sister] Betsie's pain-blanching face.

“He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. ‘How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein.’ He said. ‘To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!’ His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to people the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

“Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I prayed, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

“As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

God is our source of love, and his supply never runs low. When you have trouble loving someone, whether friend or enemy, ask God for the love you need. He will surely supply it, for it is in his very essence and will.

For many of us, growing up, our mother's were a source of unconditional love. I know many of you have experienced the love of my Mom. I want to share a picture with you that explains the source of her love. To you it may not look like much. But every morning this is the first place my Mom goes. And she spends hours at the feet of Jesus. In the same way, let us stay connected to Jesus so that we don't just profess His love but we possess His love.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that Christians should be known, first and foremost, for our love? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think most Americans perceive Christians to be generally unloving?
3. What do you think Jesus meant that the world would know we were His disciples by our love for one another? (John 13:35). Why kind of love did He mean and do you believe the Church demonstrates this kind of love? Why or why not?
4. In what ways has the love of God transformed the way you love others? What do you perceive to be the biggest hurdles to loving the way God loves?