A missionary, E. Stanley Jones, met with Mohandas Gandhi and asked him, “Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is it that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower?” Gandhi replied, “Oh, I don’t reject Christ. I love Christ. It’s just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ.” He added: “If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

If we really lived according to the teachings of Christ, all of Niagara County would be Christian today. The primary teaching of Christ is that we love one another. That’s a tall order. We’re all different. Some of us are neat, some are slobs. Some talk quickly, some slowly. Some middle class, some wealthy, some with hardly enough to eat. Sometimes we get under each other’s skin. That’s not much different from the Christian community in Jesus’s day. In fact, perhaps the Christian community in Jesus’s day was even more diverse – Gentile and Jew, master and slave, etc. Yet, always, just like the early Christian community, we are called to love one another.

The commandment to love one another is as old as the Torah. What is new, however, is that this commandment to love that Jesus speaks now derives from the Incarnation and so it means that Christians within the community are to be just as close in their love for each other as God is to Jesus. Our participation in this love relationship will be the same as the way Jesus’s is, essentially through acts of love that join each believer to God. The commandment is that we do more than just respect and tolerate each other. Jesus joined believers to God by dying for them. That means that we as Christians are to love others within our Christian community so much that we would willing to sacrifice our life for them. Even if they get on our nerves. Even if we disagree with them. Even if they are different from us. We are called to remember as Henry Fehran wrote in US Catholic magazine that God doesn’t make clones. Rather each person God makes is different, a tribute to God’s creativity. We are called to love each of these unique people. In fact, keeping this commandment to love is an identifying mark of discipleship – it’s what makes us like Jesus. Loving others, especially each other, is our most important work as disciples. Yet, it is indeed difficult work because our human natures often judge others and let that judgment distract us from loving them. Our human nature often tries to place too much importance in our own wants and needs and we let that overinflated opinion of self distract us from loving others.

Not long before his death, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to the congregation at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church:

If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. Every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize; that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards; that's not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school. I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Others outside of our Christian community are watching us. They want to see how we act toward each other. They want to see if we have anything special in our community that makes joining us worthwhile. Even if we don’t realize it, there are others outside our community who are watching to see whether we follow the teachings and example of the one whose name we claim. Yes, even in Wilson, people are watching to see if we act any differently from the rest of the world. They are watching to see if we act like Christ. Because there’s no point in joining our community if it doesn’t offer a better way of life – a way of life in which we are all willing to sacrifice for each other.

Our goal as individual Christians is to love each other as Christ loved us. Our goal as a community is to embody the relationship between Christ and God and between Christ and his disciples. When we do that, everyone around us will notice a specialness in our community, a different that makes us worth check us out. When we embody the relationship that Christ has with each church in our relationship with each other, the others watching will know we are Christians by our love.

1. Gandhi quoted by Tracy Nelson: “If Christians Were Like Christ, All of India Would Have Believed,” blog May 18, 2012. <https://thespotlessbride.wordpress.com/2012/05/18/gandhi-if-christians-were-like-christ-all-of-india-would-believe/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Martin Luther King: His Own Eulogy, <https://genius.com/Martin-luther-king-jr-his-own-eulogy-2nd-block-annotated> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)