Love is All You Need Peace Presbyterian Church

Mark 12:28-34 Gratitude Season/Festival

Elizabeth M. Deibert 4 November 2018

Yesterday’s festival was envisioned with love, it was carefully planned with love, it was lovingly carried out by so many of you. Love is all you need. Sounds so easy, but it’s not. Richard is fond of saying, “Ministry would be great if it weren’t for the people.” You can insert almost anything. Family would be great if it weren’t for the people. Politics would be great if it weren’t for the people. From the first moment I started thinking about this sermon on the Great Commandment, the end of the Beatles song kept ringing in my ear – Love is All You Need. Love is All You Need.

Love is all you need, but so often love is what is missing. Just one week ago, we were reeling with the news of the murders at the Tree of Life Synagogue. It took us back to other mass murders motivated by hate– Charleston, Pulse, and others. Yet at the Vigil organized by the Sarasota Jewish Federation, the message was all about love. Love is all you need.

Last week Jesus was saying that it would be hard for people with wealth to enter the kingdom of God. This week he’s saying to the scribe who agreed with him about which two commandments were the greatest that love is all you need, and in Mark’s Gospel, the scribe is not trying to trick Jesus. In fact, he adds the unique line about love being better than burnt offerings and sacrifices, which was central to the worship of God for an Israelite of that time. So the scribe, Jesus says, is not far from the kingdom – unlike the rich man who wants to obey the laws without giving up anything. Love involves sacrifice, you know.

Thursday was All Saints Day, a day to give thanks to God to those who have gone before us and shined God’s light of love. I will invite you at the end of our service to name saints – saints known to many or known only to you and a few others. Think about it – what is it about any person whom the church canonizes as a saint. What is it about any person whom you consider your personal saint? What is the most distinguishing characteristic if not love of God and neighbor. The love that is sacrificial, the love that is generous, the love that seeks justice and truth. When I ask you at the end of this service to name people, you will be quick to name people who loved you or loved God with a profound and powerful love. And as we name them, we will also be praying that the Spirit will enable us to deepen our love of God and neighbor. Hear the Gospel:

**28**One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, *“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”*

**29***“The most important one,”* answered Jesus*, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* ***30****Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’****31****The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’There is no commandment greater than these.”*

***32****“Well said, teacher,”* the man replied. “*You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.****33****To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*

**34**When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”*

And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Love is risky. Love requires time. Love is active. Love requires listening and acknowledging differences. Love requires giving, making personal and communal sacrifices to be a blessing to others. As someone said to me yesterday, “love is the opposite of selfishness.”

I John 4 – There is no fear in love because perfect love casts out fear. We love because God first loved us. God is love.

Those who say “I love God” but despise their brothers and sisters are liars. We cannot love God while hating a person created in the image of God.

If I love my neighbor as I love myself then I am going to be concerned that my neighbor feels safe and has a roof over head. I am going to make sure my neighbor has good food to eat and suitable clothing to wear. I am going to care about my neighbor’s well-being which includes good healthcare and education, things I expect for myself and my family. I am going to want my neighbor to have a healthy self-esteem, access to mental health, knowing that he or she is a valuable human being, created in the image of God.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus turns the question of “who is my neighbor” on its head. He wants to ask who is BEING a good neighbor, and the hero of his good neighbor story is the one that his hearers would have mistrusted. If he was telling the story today, his hero might be a Middle Eastern Muslim immigrant. Who is our neighbor – possibly someone quite different from us. To love that one is to be interested in them, to do as Jesus did, and to the shock of his followers, to sit at table with them, build a friendship.

*The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to... fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them*. Thomas Merton

Despite all the temptation to despise others, we will continue to speak the truth in love and cast our votes for leaders who are motivated by love. We will continue to gather in our houses of worship – people of all faiths – with the temptation to fear but the resolve to believe that love is the answer. As Archbishop Oscar Romero, canonized this month for his faithfulness as a Christian martyr, teaches us “You cannot reap what you have not sown. How are we going to reap love in our community, if we sow only hatred.” Do you know how Romero died? Hatred may have won that day, but the voice of Romero got stronger after he died. You know the Greek word from which we get the word *martyr* means to be a *witness.* Romero the martyr is a witness.

That great faith chapter in Hebrews 11 reminds all the saints of God that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” We may not see much evidence of love or much assurance of hope, but my friends, we are people of faith!

The Holy Spirit is still with her church, so let us continue to build one another up in faith, hope, and love, so that we can continue to reach out in our community to make God known by growing as disciples of Jesus Christ, building a community of peace, and caring for the needs of others. On this week’s anniversary of the Reformation, let us pray to God with Calvin that God will “increase our hope when it is small, awaken it when it is dormant, confirm it when it is wavering, strengthen it when it is weak, and raise it up when it is overthrown.”

Let me tell you about two people who have chosen to practice a loving, hope-filled generosity. Julia Wise, a social worker, and Jeff Kaufmann, a computer programmer, are 34 and 33 years old and have two young children. In 2008, they began donating not just 2 percent of their income to charity like most people, they decided bravely to donate half. As of two years ago, they had given away nearly $600,000. They said we have what we need, so why not? We hope our girls will grow to think this is normal.

And one final very recent testament to love: an Iranian refugee in the United States has raised over $700,000 in the last week in online donations for the Tree of Life (Etz Chaim) Synagogue. Shay Khatiri is just 29 years old, and his heart was broken for a Jewish friend who was a member there. So he responded in love.

Love is all you need – a generous spirit of love. On Friday, a conservative Rabbi from Pittsburgh and an AME pastor from Charleston embraced – no words were needed. There was a bond deeper than words, groans in the Spirit deeper than words and a shared wisdom. Love triumphs over hatred, even in great loss.