

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, May 19, 2019
5th Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year C
Primary Text: John 13:31-35
Sermon Title: “Love For On Another”

Theme

Jesus speaks of his glorification on the cross. As Jesus loves, even to death on the cross, so ought his disciples love one another. Indeed, love shall be the distinctive mark of Jesus' community.

Text

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Sermon

"What the world needs now, is love sweet love, it's the only thing that there's just too little of".

That song, written by Bacharach and David was a hit for Jackie DeShannon in 1965. In his autobiography, Burt Bacharach wrote that the song's success caught the two songwriters completely by surprise, since they were very aware of the controversy and disagreements among Americans about the Vietnam War, which was the subtext for David's lyrics. I find it ironic that at the same time there was the hippie movement, the free-love movement, the Jesus freak movement and so on.

It isn't that there was not then or still is not now enough talk about love, or enough writing about love or enough searching for love -- the song must be trying to say there's not enough authentic, barrier busting, prejudice smashing, hate defeating love. A search of the largest bookstore on the internet produces over three thousand titles on the subject of love. Most of them have to do with the difficulties, barriers or aberrations of love.

Here is a list of what the American Medical Association says are the top killers in our society. You could probably guess most of them. Heart disease, hypertension, and cancer are all on the list. BUT... the worst disease of all was not listed. Do you know what this most devastating disease of all is? It is a horrible disorder and every person on earth is vulnerable to its consequences.

Here it is: The most destructive disease on planet earth is lack of love! Not love that comes and goes, or love that fades with the passing of months and years. What the world needs now is authentic, accepting, forgiving, unconditional love.

Dr. Bernie Siegel is a surgeon, but a most unusual one. He is better known as the author of, "Love, Miracles and Medicine". He followed that up with a book called, "Peace, Love and Healing."

In the introduction to his first book, Dr. Siegel writes:

"Psychologists have shown that the effects of love on the body can be measured: An unloved infant will have retarded bone growth and may even die; a stroked infant grows faster. The effects of peace of mind are measurable

too: ... Love and peace of mind do protect us... they allow us to overcome the problems that life hands us... As children, however, most of us did not grow up in an environment with sufficient love and hope. It is time to move beyond that legacy of lovelessness, to forgive and be reborn."

So it's not surprising then, that on this day, in the year 2019, the church is pointed back to its primary agenda. Jesus says, "I'm not going to be with you much longer. But listen carefully to my last instructions to you, the one last thing that if you forget everything else I've taught you, this would be the one thing I hope you never forget ... love one another."

There is so much disappointment with the experience of love in our culture that we in the church dare not fail in this regard. We may have organizational failure from time to time, but we can recover from that. We will experience program failure occasionally, and we can re-program and recover from that. However, if we experience a failure in love, we are detached from the very center of what it means to be the church.

Is there such a thing as a love that can really last? A love so powerful and so true that it would never end? If there were such a love, it would be the root and the ground of every positive human affection - it would be the foundation of every parent-child, husband-wife and brother-sister relationship. Such a love would be the glue that held families, communities and churches together. And if there was such a love, would we not give almost anything to learn where could it be found?

Jesus' words in our Gospel Reading point us to exactly such a love. They set the standard for what it means to be the church. If ever there was hope for authentic, lasting love, it is found in these words. When we are able to understand, embrace and practice the words of Jesus in this passage, we will be close to a transformation of our lives and of our church! The words are deceptively simple, but to work them and knead them into the fiber of our souls is spiritual work of the first magnitude.

Jesus was the love of God wrapped up in flesh. Christians represent the love of Christ wrapped up in a fellowship. There is an absolutely amazing power in genuine love. **There is** a love that can really last. It is the love of Christ living within his people. It is a love that will not die even when death comes. It is truly the love that can last - not only for now, but forever!

There is a "crunch point" that comes to each one of us when we try to live by Jesus' "new commandment". If each one of us in the church is to love every single other one in the church - how many churches would you give a passing grade?

Better yet ... would you give yourself a passing grade? Are there specific names and faces that come to mind when I ask, "Who specifically in this church, do you have a hard time with when it comes to keeping Jesus' commandment?"

Here's the key: You first have to acknowledge that you cannot keep this commandment by your own strength. Then you have to come to the conclusion that you need help. And the help is available. Paul wrote in Romans (5:5),

Romans 5:5 (NRSV)

⁵ God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. We supply the empty heart and God supplies the love via the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

My Raisin' the Bar Challenge for you this week is a question: Are you willing to have God love this person (or persons) you have a hard time with, through you? That is to say, if God supplies the love, will you give it?

When you can say yes to this, you will have centered your life in that which can give lasting love in every facet of your living!

Prayer

Lord your Son left us with one awesome last commandment. Do we really need to love everyone? There are some people who really get on my nerves. They seem to be from another planet. I don't understand why they are so annoying. He surely didn't mean them did he?

OK, I'll start over. Almighty and ever-loving God, you must be almighty because Paul says that your Holy Spirit can somehow make it possible for me to love even

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those who I find so unlovable. Send us that grace now. We pray this in Jesus
name. Amen