

May 17, 2009

Scripture: John 15: 9-17

Sermon: "A Greater Love"

We continue this week with the second part of chapter fifteen found in the Gospel of John. And once again we hear the call to abide with God as God abides in us. Once again, we hear about the power and the freeing nature of God's love. Once again, we hear about how we as communities of faith are suppose to interact, support, and yes, love one another. Once again, we hear the call to love one another.

Which got me thinking: Do you think the author of John knew that he was repeating himself? Maybe his editor skipped a couple of pages while proof-reading and didn't catch this double message of love. Maybe John was writing and then got called away and he just picked up where he left off, not realizing that he had already said that stuff about love before. Or maybe John decided to write this stuff about love twice because it is a hard lesson for us humans to hear, to learn and to live out in our lives-this call to love one another as Jesus loves us; to bear fruit that lasts in a world that is starving for good news; to fully abide with God by sharing God's love for all through our actions and deeds. Maybe John thought we needed to hear this message again. Maybe John thought his community needed to hear this word of love once more. Especially after his very own community, a new community of faith, a beginning church, was already arguing and bickering, was already struggling with the command to abide in God by showing God's love to one another.

Maybe just like his community, our world, our community needs to hear this word of love once more. Especially now when nothing in life seems stable and secure. Jobs are being lost. Retirement funds and dreams are dwindling. The National debt is sky-rocketing. Our pay checks just don't seem to cover as much as they used to. We hear reports about institutions that have been around for ages struggling to survive. We turn to the institution of the church for a firm foundation only to find that churches are closing their doors or we find that many churches are struggling with what it means to serve in a changing world.

There is a sense of instability and insecurity that has invaded and penetrated every aspect of our lives.

And we are looking for something to cling to, something to grasp to give us security; something to give us strength and encouragement until this storm passes, something to help us find our feet again and give us a firm and solid foundation.

And for John, and for us, that something is each other, that something is a community of faith that loves us and supports us, that something that will give us strength and encouragement is a community grounded and connected to each other, relying on one another, supporting one another, loving each other as God loves. A community that knows that it cannot do it alone, that like the branches connected to the vine, it is so intertwined that one cannot tell where one starts and one stops.

I remember having conversations as a child with my fellow playmates that went something like this:

“So and so said that she didn’t like you.”

Well, that’s okay, because I don’t like her either.

But it says in the Bible that you are supposed to love everyone.

Well, I love her in that way, the way that Jesus says that I have to, but I don’t really like.

Did you have those conversations as well? I would always say, “I love like Jesus says we are supposed to love, but I don’t really like her,.” Like that one phrase made everything okay. Like if I said that one phrase, then it really didn’t matter what I did or said towards that person. That one phrase: “Love her like Jesus loves her” was the get out of jail free card.

Even now, there are moments especially when I am driving in Lexington that I think: “Okay, you are a child of God. I have to love you, but you are making it really hard.”

In my mind growing up, there was a divide: a church world and the real world. As long as I loved this person, in the church world, in the way that Jesus loved them, it didn’t matter what I said or did towards that person. It didn’t matter.

As I continue to grow in faith, I have come to realize that there are not two worlds: the church world and the real world. There is only the one world that I am called to live in as a person of faith and that I am called to reflect God’s love in all that I do and say. I have come to realize that I can’t divide God’s love to fit my needs or my wants. God’s love just doesn’t work that way. God loves us: the good, the bad, the ugly, the successful, the poor, the young, the old and all those in between.

And since I am connected to that person or this person through God’s love, I am responsible for that person. I am called to look out for that person’s good. I am called to support that person in this world, whether I like them or not. I am called to love them as Jesus loves me and called to bear fruit that lasts as a result of that love.

What a great lesson in faith. What a humbling lesson in faith, but what a hard lesson in faith to live out in our lives. To love as Jesus loves.

That is why John repeats himself. That is why John keeps repeating the commandment to love one another as the Father has loved us. That is why John keeps saying that there is no greater love than God’s love for us and we are called to bear the fruit that lasts as a result of God’s love in our lives. He knows that as humans, we need boundaries. We need to know who is in and who is out. We believe that we can make it on our own.

John is reminding us that Jesus came and changed all that. Jesus came and through his death showed us how much God truly loves us. Jesus came and chose us, us, people who are imperfect, people who are broken, people who are very much human, to tell this world the Good News. Jesus came and invited us to abide in God just as God abides in us.

John is reminding us that we are called to live in this world, this broken, hurting world and to love kindness, make justice and to walk humbly with our God. That all our actions, all our words must be rooted in one commandment: Love one another as Jesus love us. That it doesn't matter whether we like one another or not, but that we are responsible for and to each other because we are connected through God's love.

And for John, his community, and our community, that is what makes the difference. God's love. That Jesus commands us to love as God loves us. John knew that if he had written that we are called to love others as we love ourselves, that it would be a real problem. because we have to admit there are times that we don't like ourselves, let alone love ourselves.

If we love as Jesus loves us, we will see all through God's eyes. We would see past the faults, see past the differences, see past the things that separate us and just see the person as God created them to be. We would see the image of God in everyone and know that all are welcome and loved by God. We would realize that whether or not we like this person doesn't matter. We are connected to this person and responsible for and to this person.

Then once we realize this, once we start to do this, to love as God loves us, we could live out the vision of God's Kingdom here on earth as a community of faith and be "channels for the divine love that is God's gift to the whole world in Christ."

We are called to love as Jesus loves us and we know that this love is life-changing. This love is transforming. It is patient. It is kind. It is not envious or rude. This love does not insist on its own way. This love bears all things. It believes all things. It hopes all things. It endures all things. We know that it binds us together as brothers and sister in faith.

There is no divide between church world and real world. There is only one world and this world will know us by our love for one another. Because it is our love for another, not as we love ourselves, but as God loves us, that will be the most convincing witness to the "truth and power of the gospel [message] that [we] proclaim."

We have experienced God's love in our lives. We have experienced the power of God's love in our lives. We have experienced the sacrifice of God's love in our lives and have been humbled and changed by this experience.

We have the ultimate example: "Jesus' actions provide the pattern by which [we] are to act toward one another." We are "known, and held, and loved but we are commanded [as well] to belong to one another."

We are called to show this world that they will know we are Christians by our love. We are called to show God's love through our actions and our deeds, in everything that we do. We are called to bear fruit that lasts and will satisfy this hungry, broken world. God first loved us and that love is never ending...

. And because God sees us, and knows us, and still loves us, we can dare to see ourselves, know ourselves, and accept ourselves as we are known, and forgiven and loved. And it is out of this

life transforming love that we are called to love each other, to bear each other, to build each other up, to stay with each other. It is this life changing love that forms the basis of our lives as Christians.

Our lives are changed by God's love. And this love cannot stay only between two people or behind these doors of Midway Christian Church. This love drives us, urges us, inspires us to go out into our community and share God's love with all that we meet.

May we strive to love one another as Jesus loves us and to live out this love in all that we say and do. Amen.

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