

“Honor One Another”

Romans 12: 9-21

We are continuing our conversation about how as people of faith we are called to be in relationship with one another through connected community. I chose this particular text because it correlates so well with the second sacred truth, as part of the framework for the Tree of Life, that second sacred truth being, “Honor One Another.”

Honor is such an old-fashioned word, isn't it? We don't talk much about honor in regards to our relationships nowadays, do we? Honor just isn't part of our everyday conversations. It doesn't really fit into our cultural context. It is almost as if honor is a leftover ideal from days gone by. Sure, we know the word honor is frequently used within our sacred texts but we can usually brush off that old fashioned word with a “let's find a better translation, or let's find something which better fits our understanding of what it means to be a person of faith.” Even for us traditional type communities of faith, we don't really use the word “honor” to describe how we live out our relationships with each other as people of faith. Love and grace yes...those are some of our all-time favorites, but honor, not so much.

So I guess I should not have been too surprised when I struggled with the meaning and concept of the word “honor” as I sat down to write this sermon. And I

don't think I am the only one. Usually when I send out the weekly Theology Tuesdays, I get back a few responses. This week, not so much. Well, that's not exactly true. I did get back a "Each week, your questions keeping getting more difficult for me to answer." I'm going to take that as a compliment, hoping that I am making all of us, myself included, think more about how our faith plays a role in our words and actions as a people of faith.

So I thought since honor is not necessarily a word we often use in the context of our faith, I thought we could at least name some of our assumptions when we see it shared within our sacred texts. We may know that the word "honor" can be translated from the same Greek word for "price" meaning that in our sacred texts, to honor one another means to treat each person as valuable, costly, or precious. So we can assume in faith terms, when Paul or other Biblical writers use the word honor, they are calling us as disciples of Christ to recognize each other's worth in all we do and say, to celebrate each individual as a Beloved Children of God, claimed and named and loved more than we will ever imagine. We can also assume when Paul or other Biblical writers use the word honor, they are calling their communities, they are calling us to a realized shared responsibility, to a realized shared accountability among each other. We can even assume that when Paul and other Biblical writers use the word honor, they are

hoping to cultivate a sense of mutual trust and support within the larger Body of Christ.

As we read our sacred text , we can assume that when Paul or other Biblical writers use the word honor, they are calling us as people of faith to act in ways which bring out the best in ourselves and others.

But our assumptions are only part of the picture. Honor is so much more than a feel good aren't we all friends type of emotion. For us as people of faith, when Paul or other Biblical writers use the word honor, they are also referencing the covenant of our faith, a covenant which grounds us in relationship not only with others but with God as well, a covenant which is part of the faith narrative for three of the major faith traditions, a covenant which God reminds the people of time and time again, a covenant which calls us to love God with all our heart, mind, body and soul, a covenant which calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

For us as people of faith, when Paul or other Biblical writers use the word honor, they are talking about our power of choice, our choice in how we view the world, choice in how we relate to others, choice in how we will live out this covenantal relationship with our neighbors, with our God each and every day. For us as people of faith, when Paul or other Biblical writers use the word honor, they are showing us how this awe-inspiring power of trust, how this strengthening

power of accountability, how this binding power of responsibility motivates us to make the choices we do.

So maybe knowing how many times the word honor is actually used in our sacred text, both Old Testament and New Testament, maybe it is time we reclaim this powerful yet humbling word and begin using it as part of our framework for the choices we make every day as disciples of Christ.

In order to do that, we need to take a closer look at our passage for today. We find in our reading that Paul tells us we are to honor one another, to let love be genuine, to hate what is evil and to hold fast to what is good. He goes on describing what commentators have classified as "marks of the true Christian.

As I have lived with this text this past week, I'm not sure I agree with the commentators on this particular designation. Like we said last week, too often when we don't achieve the ideal of unity, or don't achieve the ideal of honor, we tend to take the easy way out, meaning that too often we shrug off the difficult, messy, frustrating work of grace when we don't achieve what we assume to be the only marks of "true Christians".

However, one of the things we know to be true is that we as people of faith are called to show this world, to show our communities, and yes, even remind

ourselves time and time again, that we are called to show that there is a another way, a way of love, a way of grace, a way of unity, and yes a way of honor.

So again, when we use the difficult, messy, frustrating work of grace as our starting point in reading this text, we realize that Paul is not telling us that these are things we are to achieve. Instead, these are things we are to be, we are to become...we are to become people who honor one another, we are to become people who let love be genuine. We are to become people who hate what is evil and to hold fast to what is good. Paul isn't giving us a list of things we can mark off our lists. Instead Paul is re-orienting us in the ways of God's love. He is telling us that when it comes to our faith, we can't just talk about it in theory. Rather, faith involves our mind, heart, body and soul. It is the practice of the whole person becoming who God created and calls us to be.

Or as one commentator put it....Paul assumed the community of faith in Rome knew they were called to love. What he is doing in this section is taking that assumption one step farther by exhorting the people to make their love genuine as they honor one another.

What Paul is telling the Romans, is telling us is that we honor one another when we realize that we make choices each and every day, choices with the money we spend, choices with the organizations we support, choices with our time and

talents, choices with the clothes we wear. And these choices not only affect us but they affect the whole system for better and for worse. Honoring one another invites us to pause and think... to think about our choices, to think about our words, to think about our actions. Honoring one another goes beyond the superficial just being nice to one another. Honoring one another challenges us to “bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them, to rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, to live in harmony with one another; to not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; [Honoring one another means that we do] not claim to be wiser than we are. And that we do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on us, live peaceably with all. Because as Paul writes to the Romans...Honoring one another means “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; Honoring one another means Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

As I said, in my Theology Tuesday, I don't have all the answers yet but it seems to me this distinction, this distinction of making love genuine, is what honoring one another is all about, it is what makes all the difference. Honoring one another goes beyond just being nice to one another and challenges us to engage one another in the messy, difficult, frustrating, breath takingly beautiful work of grace.

I wish that I had a wonderful sermon illustration on just how we are to do that but unfortunately, as I sat down to write this sermon, all the news showed me were ways we as humankind were dishonoring one another. From the shooting in New Zealand, to the scandal of college admissions, to even our very own community if the posts on Midway Musings regarding the I Welcome resolution coming to city council tomorrow night are any indication, it seems like power, might and fear continue to be the ways of the world rather than us honoring one another as Beloved Children of God.

As I listened to the narrative of hurt and hate which fills our world, fills our community, I was confused and frustrated, I was hopeless and sad. I wondered how in the world I was going to be able to stand up in front of you today and offer the good news when my heart was so battered from the narrative of hurt and hate...that is until a friend reminded me of something. She said, "Reading the news filled with more stories of hate related crimes made me search for hope in this world. There had to be words which would change the narrative. She shared that she remembered a quote from Nelson Mandela and that it was starting to become her mantra every time she hears these stories of hate related crimes. Whenever she hears how the world is filling with brokenness, she lifts these words to the universe and prays..." "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn

to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to them human heart than its opposite...What we need to realize is that this transformation from hate to love all begins with the choices we make.”

May it be so. Amen.