

Thoughts on Love

Parting Thoughts: Part 4 “Thoughts on Love”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – June 30 2024

6th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Romans 13:7-10; Mark 12:28-34

Reflection: Psalm 100

Greeting: Praise the Lord, all you nations! Worship him, all you peoples! Because God’s faithful love toward us is strong, the Lord’s faithfulness lasts forever! Praise the Lord!

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for your presence with us day by day. We thank you for calling us to the celebration of your steadfast love that endures forever. Helps us to remember your call to love our neighbor all the days of our lives. May we always remember the salvation we find in your Son, our savior when we remember the sacrifice made in love. Bring us together this day that we can share in the redemption that we find in your call to love one another as we share in our love for you, our Lord. We pray that we may always seek your peace and to share your grace with one another. Help us to celebrate the hope that we have because you are with us forever and always, and it is in Jesus’ name we pray this day. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him; bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 100 and hear of celebrating God’s love. That we are called to rejoice in everything we know about our Lord. That we join together with thanksgiving and praise for the God who loves us. As we come together this day, how will you celebrate the love of Christ with those around you? How will you carry that love out into the world? How will that love influence your prayers this week? How can you show that love to the people around you? How will you carry that love with you always and everywhere? How can we share in the love that we find in sharing in God’s peace together?

Prayer: Everlasting God, you have brought us together that we may remember the love that we find through your unending grace. We are all invited to love you with all that we are and to celebrate you in all that we do. Help us to experience your love each and every day. We turn to you now with the joys and the concerns that we bring before you this day. May you grant us comfort and guidance in all things. We lift up our celebrations that we have spoken before you.

We lift up the concerns that we share together. We also bring before you the silent troubles and triumphs that we hold within. We pray that we experience your grace and mercy in our laughter and our tears and that you are with us in sorrow and rejoicing. Grant that we may always hold firm and joyfully to this faith, and may we be one with you, who calls us in love to his table, for ever and ever. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 1 through 9.

“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:1-9 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from Romans chapter 13, verse 7 through 10.

Pay to all what is due them: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:7-10 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Mark chapter 12, verse 28 through 34.

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself’—this is much more important than all

whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question. (Mark 12:28-34 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

I struggled to write this message. I tried multiple times because it was hard to not get emotional just sitting down to write. I knew that I had to narrow down this final thought into the one thing that I wanted to leave you with. I needed to be as simple as I could. So, this final parting thought is on love. For me, love is at the heart of everything I believe. I interpret the Bible through love. I understand Christ through love. I included this reading from Mark because it really sums up the core of faith for me. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is asked what the first commandment is, as there is a dispute among the scribes as to what the greatest commandment is. Jesus tells them that the first is to love God with all that you are. But then he adds a second, that you should love your neighbor as yourself. I don't think Jesus said what the second was to satisfy curiosity. I think he put the two together because the first is impossible without the second. Jesus is quoting different Old Testament passages here. Loving your neighbor is a quote of Leviticus, while the other comes from Deuteronomy. I included that reading today so that we could hear what Jesus means when he says to love God. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” That we should keep this idea close to us at all times, putting it on signposts and gates, even that you should write it on your forehead and fix it to your hand. That we should have constant reminders with us to love God with all that we are. The thing is, is that I believe these two are put together because Jesus is trying to tell the scribes who were debating that you cannot love God without being able to love your neighbor. That if you cannot love your neighbor, then you are not able to love God with all your soul and all your heart and all your might. I really got to thinking about that because of how central love is in the way that we live out our journey in Christ. We hear Paul talk about this in Romans. He says that you should give people what is due them. Give taxes to who taxes are due, give revenue to who revenue is due, give respect to who respect is due, and give honor to those whom honor is due. Why? So that you won't owe anyone anything. Almost. Because when Paul believes that there is still something that we will always owe, and that is love. We love one another to fulfill the law. We love one another because Christ has called us to love. That every commandment that matters is summed up with “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

When Paul talks love doing no wrong to a neighbor, I was reminded of some of the foundational parts of Methodism. And that's John Wesley's rules. He worded them a little differently, but Bishop Ruben P. Job did an excellent job of summarizing them into three simple rules. They are “Do No Harm,” “Do Good,” and “Stay in Love with God.” These rules guide us in how to live and help us to understand our own faith. They guide us in living out our faith in a way that is meaningful and productive. Now, I think that the order of these rules does matter. Because there is a method to being a United Methodist. The order helps us to love our

neighbor the best we can so that we can have a deeper love with God. The order helps us to live out our journey in Christ to its fullest. We begin with doing no harm because you are not showing love to a neighbor to intentionally harm them. If we are doing harm, then we are not doing good. If we are harming another, that is not how we stay in love with God. So, our first step then needs to be that we are not doing harm to another. The next is that we do good. To show that we love our neighbor we must act on that love. If we are going to stay in love with God, we must actively do good as a part of that love. We have this order because sometimes we decide something is good without contemplating if it might harm someone. With this, before we act, we think about if it may cause harm first. Once we see no harm, then we act to help our neighbor. We actively help our neighbor so that we love both our neighbor and God. And if we are doing no harm and we are doing good, we will then be able to stay in love with God. That we remember our baptism and remember the good done for us when we share in Holy Communion. That we act on the love that God has shown us. That we remember the love of Christ so that we do no harm, so that we do good, so that we continue to grow in our love of God and neighbor. As we grow in love, we are better equipped to avoid doing harm, which in turn enables us to do more good in this world. As we continue to do good, our love for our neighbor grows, and in turn our love for God grows that much more. The guidance of the Holy Spirit helps us to do no harm, the love of Christ the Son inspires us to do good, and when we do we grow in the love of our Heavenly Father. And we see that this cycle of love is an endless opportunity for growth in our journey in Christ.

This love is also how I interpret all of Scripture. That might sound like a lot, but it really is the place that I begin. Because when I read, I think about what Paul is saying here. I think about what Jesus says about the greatest commandments. These commandments encompass the entirety of the law. If we accept that they are the most important then we can use them to understand all of Scripture. Using this lens to view the Bible helps me to understand things that Jesus says. When Jesus says that we may have known the law to call for an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth but that we should instead forgive, it is because of love. Retribution is not love. Retribution might make us feel better in the moment, but it is not love and it will not make things better. Retribution is always going to do harm. Retribution will not help us to do good. Instead, we are called to share the love found in forgiveness so that we grow in our love of God and neighbor. And we can do that for any place in the Bible to gain wisdom and understanding and insight. When I read the Bible and I come to a section that raises a difficult problem I ask myself a few questions. Where is the love? Will this help me love my neighbor as myself? Will this help me to love God with my whole being? I may ask if trying to follow my interpretation will do harm. I can ask if it will help me to do good. And I can ask if it will help me to stay in love with God. If I cannot find the love, then I do not hold it as central to my own faith. Because whether we admit it or not, we all decide what parts of Scripture matter the most. I have yet to meet anyone that follows every single part of the law. But what happens if we interpret differently? How can we ever agree if we are all picking and choosing? That brings me to another related thought. John Wesley had a phrase that I believe is something we should all

take to heart. That we should think and let think. That for all opinions that do not strike at the very heart of being a Christian, we can accept that we have different opinions. I have never known two people to share all the same opinions. If we try to force uniformity on every single issue, we will quickly become a church of one, which is no church at all. Having different opinions comes from different experiences and different viewpoints. If we are to love one another, then we should be able to listen to one another. If we are to love God, we should be able to share a space with others who also love God. Because we are all people who need love, and we are all people who need forgiveness.

That leads me to my final thought on love. This relates to not only how I interpret Scripture but also how I live out my life in Christ. This is something that has helped me to bring my focus back to love time and again. It has helped me to seek a way to love God and to love my neighbor as myself. Because one of the things I try to remember is that I could be wrong. I know that may surprise you, but it turns out I in fact do not know everything. But the truth is that I am only human. Which means I have to decide what my goal as a Christian is. Is it to be right or is it to be right with God? If I am to be right with God, then I want to hold the grace of God as my example. If I am to make a mistake in my judgement, I would rather err on the side of grace. If I need to be forgiven for offering too much grace and love to those I meet, then I will ask my Savior to forgive me just as I always have. But I would rather choose grace over condemnation because God chose grace when dealing with me. If I am to love my neighbor as myself, I would ask for grace for the things that I get wrong. I have seen the love of Christ change lives through grace and love, but I have never seen them changed by condemnation and judgement. That is why I choose grace and I choose love. The love that I have found in my Lord and Savior has gotten me this far, so I'll keep on trusting it. Love has seen me though in days past and love will see me through wherever I go. And wherever I go will carry your love with me as well and pray that you know my love is always with you. That we share a love together in Christ, that we are one in Christ, and we will always be united in Christ. So today I say thank you. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for the love that you have shown me and my family in these many years we have been together. Thank you for helping me to grow, as a pastor, a father, and as a fellow Christian. Thank you for being my friend. May the love of the Father guide you. May the love of the Son comfort you. And may the love of the Holy Spirit rejuvenate you. All that you may love God and love your neighbor. May love see you through all things, until we meet again. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy	Jeff & Laurie Davidson
Connie Brown	Thelma Ball	Stephanie Strewsbury	John Graves
Cathleen Carl	Vivian Hallet	Marilyn Scott	Jim Stevens
Wes Martin	Mary Shumaker	Matthew Shoaff	Family of Donna Cutright
Family of Roger Nickum	Eric Wilson	Joan Martin	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Greg Williams	Jim & Kay Wells	Earl Sparks

Susie Kemper

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