

“Being the Church that LOVES”

NT: Acts 4:5-12
John 10:11-18
1 John 3:16-24

Being the Church that KNOWS, ABIDES and GROWS, WORSHIPS...

In preparing and leading the Men’s Bible Study this week, I encountered a quote I feel is essential for us as we seek to better understand our call to be the Church that yes, KNOWS and GROWS and WORSHIPS, but also LOVES:

William Barclay wrote in reflection to James 1:26-27, “The most splendid of worship inside is useless if it doesn’t send us out to LOVE God by LOVING our fellow human being and to walk more purely in the tempting ways of the world.”

Examples of love can be found throughout the Bible. Why? Because that is who and what God is all about. We could say the Bible is nothing more than a love story sharing how much and how God love’s God’s children and how God’s children are to love one another.

The story we read in Acts 4 is about an act of love, healing the sick, only possible by the name of Jesus.

The bold declaration of Jesus saying, “I am the good shepherd,” reveals the love a shepherd has for the sheep in the flock. A willingness to lay down his/her life. Not running away when trouble comes but standing to protect. Knowing who the sheep are, having a relationship with them.

John continues in 1 John 3, “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before God.”

Then, of course, we have Paul’s love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 where he defines God’s ultimate love, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love- God’s love- never ends.”

LOVE is the most essential theme in the Bible. If we do not know anything else about who is who or what happens in detail in the Bible, we can be assured the who and what have something to do with LOVE. The greatest commandment given to us by God, meaning the most important things we are to do above all else- before yardwork, finances, our next meeting or homework assignment, golf, or football- is "To LOVE God and to LOVE your neighbor as yourself."

There are three short stories I would like to share this morning. Each is about love. And since it is Mother's Day, the first two are a nod of appreciation to all mothers and women who express their love for their children and others in so many ways. If you have heard them before, I invite you to listen for something new that might inspire you.

There once was a conversation between a child who is about to be born and God.

The child said, "You are sending me to earth but how am I going to live there so small and helpless?" God smiled and replied, "You don't have to worry. I have already chosen one of my angels for you. She will be waiting for you and take care of you."

The child said, "Here in heaven I don't have to do anything. I just sing and smile but on earth I won't be able to sing?" God replied, "Your angel will sing for you every day and you will be able to feel her love and feel happy."

The child said, "But how am I going to be able to understand when people talk to me? I don't understand their language." God replied, "Don't worry. Your angel will tell you the most beautiful and sweet words you will ever hear and with patience and care she will teach you how to speak."

Child looked at God and with a sad face said, "But what am I going to do if I want to talk to you?" God looked at the child with a smile and said, "Oh, your angel will teach you how to pray and through prayers you will always be able to talk to me."

The child said, "But I have heard that there are bad people on earth. How will I be able to protect myself?" God replied, "Your angel will defend you, even if it means risking her life."

At that moment there was much peace in heaven but voices from earth could already be heard. In a hurry the child asked, "There is one last thing I want to know before leaving. Please tell me my angel's name." God said, "My dear, your angel's name is not important, but I can tell you that you will simply call her MOTHER."

Did you hear the love of God and of the child? Did you hear the call and honor to love that is the privilege of motherhood.

Another story about love goes like this:

Once in a village, two women were fighting over a little child. The matter was taken to the wise village chief. The first woman spoke up, "He is my child. Please tell her to leave him alone." The other woman cried, "No, he is mine." Wise man said to the first woman, "What do you have to say?" She replied, "He is my child. I was bathing in the river and had left my son on the riverbank. This woman lifted my child and ran away. I hurriedly dressed and ran after her." The village chief asked the other woman to explain her side. She said, "She is a liar. I was the one bathing in the river and he is my only child. She came there and picked up my child and ran. Luckily, I was able to catch her."

Villagers who were watching this didn't know whom to believe. The wise man got up and using a twig drew a line on the ground. Then he asked both to stand on either side of the line and placed the child in the middle. Then he asked one woman to hold the child's left hand and asked the other woman to hold his right hand. Then he said, "Now, listen carefully. Both of you need to pull the child to your side. The child belongs to whoever drags the child over to her side." Both women were holding the hands of the child and the first woman started to pull the child hard to get him to her side. As the child cried in pain, the other woman let go of the child's hand saying, "I can't do this. Let her have the child."

The first woman took the child and shouted in triumph, "He is mine." As the other woman broke down in tears. "Wait" said the village chief. Turning to the villagers the chief asked, "Who do you think loves the child more? The one who pulled the child to her side or the one who let the child go?" The villagers didn't answer. Then the village chief took away the child from the first woman and gave the child to the other saying, "Only a mother can have a tender heart for her child. She couldn't bear the pain the child was feeling and that's why she let his hand go."

Sometimes love is tough, but it is love because it is in the best interest of another who may not know it yet. Maybe we could think about LOVE as the greatest superpower, a better choice for all of life's battles instead of anger or fighting or violence. Being the Church that LOVES is being the Church that fights for what is right with LOVE, in LOVE, for LOVE.

The third story is also about love, but more specifically, the benefit of choosing LOVE.

Once in a village, a woman saw three old men sitting outside her house. They were sitting there for a quite a while. The woman went outside and said, "I saw that you were sitting here for a longtime, you must be hungry. Please come in and have something to eat." The men asked, "Is the man of the house at home?" The woman replied, "No." The men replied, "Then we cannot come in."

The woman went back inside. In the evening, when her husband came, she told him about the old men sitting outside and all of what happened. The husband sent his wife back outside to ask those men to come in and have some food. She went and said, "My husband is now home. Please come inside and have some food."

The men replied, "We do not go inside a house together." "Why?" asked the woman. One of the old men explained. Pointing to one of his friends he said, "His name is wealth. If he goes with you, your home will be filled with wealth always. Then pointing to the other man, he said his name is success. If he goes with you, you will always be successful in any endeavor you start. And I am love. If I go with you, then your home will be filled with love always." He then said, "Go in and discuss with your husband which one of us you would like in your home."

The woman went inside and told her husband about what the old man said. Her husband was overjoyed to listen about it and said, "Let's invite wealth. Let him come and fill our home with wealth." The wife disagreed and said, "No. Why don't we invite success?" Their daughter-in-law was listening to their back and forth. She came to them and suggested, "Wouldn't it be better if we invite love in our home. Then our home will be filled with love forever." The husband and wife agreed to her advice.

The woman went outside and said, "Which one of you is love? Please come in and be our guest." Love got up and started walking toward the house. Just then the other two also got up and started following him. The woman asked, "You said that not all can come together. I invited only love. Why are you coming in?" The old men replied, "If you had invited wealth or success then the other two would have stayed outside, but since you invited love, wherever he goes, we go with him."

Richard Rohr provides a meditation that offers, "To love is to allow something to flow through us." What does he mean? He says, "Jesus commanded us to love; so we know love is not just a feeling, since we cannot command feelings. Love is mostly a decision. Jesus did not say: When you get healed, love; when you grow up, love; when you feel loving, love; when you get it

together and have dealt with all your mother/father/husband/children wounds, then you must love. No, **the commandment for all of us is to love now, and thus fill the tragic gaps of every moment.** I think we know the love of God much more when we ourselves can “do love” than when people tell us we are loveable. (That just feels good!) We can always disbelieve the second, but the first is an unexplainable power from beyond ourselves. When we “do love” we know we are being used, and the “Living Water”, *the “Bread of Life”, the “Light of the World”, the true and ultimate source of love,* is flowing through us.”

How do we “do love” as Rohr states? We can insert our name into 1 Corinthians 13, “Peter is patient; Peter is kind....” We can also embrace and embody the prayer we prayed “O for a World” as our opening hymn. Did you hear the words we sang in the opening hymn?

Everyone respects each other’s ways;
All is done with justice and with praise;
Goods are shared; Misery relieved;
Truth is spoken; Children spared; Equality achieved;
One world family; Strive to unity;
Poor are rich, Weak are strong, Foolish are wise;
Outcasts belong; Those who perish will rise;
Time and tears will be no more;...

All these express God’s glorious reign of peace as illustrations of LOVE.

“O for a World where all but love will cease...”

We pray for this, but do we believe it can happen? Do we believe it can be? Do we really want it to be? Are we willing to do our part and help make these a reality through the way we LOVE one another?

As we close today, I will ask you, “What is one act of love you can commit to above and beyond what you are already doing? What is something bold you can do that reveals God’s love to someone? To go one step further, will we consider that someone to be someone we do not know; someone who may or may not know God?” Let us push ourselves and therefore push the witness of God’s love. Let us not just know that we are called to be the Church that LOVES, let’s LOVE, and LOVE boldly!

Let all God’s beloved children say... Amen.