

Sermon – “Love Says It All”

Text – Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

Should we be worried or hopeful? What do you think?

While I must confess that there is much happening in our world that is worrisome and that we need to pay attention to; I believe that we have cause to be hopeful.

This world of ours is such an amazing creation. Plants provide the oxygen that we need to sustain life and the waste product of our respiration, carbon dioxide is what plants need. While the soil of the earth provides the minerals that are needed for plants to grow. Then there is the whole interplay of forces that affect our weather systems which produce proper conditions for growth. It is an incredibly complex system. A system which we believe is a precious gift from God that enables life to exist here on earth.

The God of Creation has not only given us the gift of life but has created us in God's image and desires to live in relationship with us. God has throughout time reached out to and made God's love for us known. God has spoken to man and given us a set of principles upon which to base our life that we might prosper and know God's love. The Hebrew people understood this when they proclaimed: “How blessed are we among all people for God has given us the law.” It is interesting to note that the study of various societies has revealed that there appear to be a set of principals or laws that are held in common, what theologians refer to as Natural Law.

But unfortunately, throughout history we have violated the gift of law or misused it to our benefit at the expense of others. We have grown skilled at justifying modifying God's laws until they bear little resemblance to God's will. We like Adam and Eve have desired to substitute our own wisdom for that of our Creator. We have desired to do that which is pleasing to and benefits us.

But throughout history individuals have heard God's voice calling God's people to return to God's ways and enjoy once again the abundant life that we were created to enjoy. To return to following God's principles for life. For some that meant a zealous following of the laws and the interpretation of their application to daily life. Laws that would enable to observant to live every aspect of their daily life in harmony with God. Sometimes these voices calling people to return to God's ways were welcomed but often they were meant with ridicule or outright hostility. For following God's ways is not always easy and often requires change. And let's face it, no matter how logical it is or how great the benefit change is never easy. Psychologists tell us all change is source of stress, even good news such as the receiving a promotion.

God is persistent in God's efforts to reach out to us. So great is God's desire for us to be in a healthy, loving relationship with us and us with one another that God's Son Jesus came and dwelt among us in human form and endured death upon a cross. Jesus was willing to endure an agonizing death upon that we might know God's amazing love and our relationships with one another be transformed by that love. All that God revealed in the laws and teaching of the prophets is an act of love. We accept and make our own God's amazing plan revealed in the wonder of creation, the gift of the law, and teachings of the prophets when we accept God's love for us and share that love with one another.

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Is there any problem that wouldn't disappear if we all truly loved our neighbor as ourselves? Wouldn't conflicts over material goods among individuals and even nations disappear if we would truly love one another? Wouldn't we be able to advance research on the cure for cancer and other diseases if we finally able to give peace a chance? I know that this may sound like an impossible dream. Yet when we look around us don't we see signs of God's kingdom in our midst? Individuals reaching out in love to their neighbors providing aid to victims of natural disaster, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick. In acts, large and small we can God's love made flesh and blood, the hands and feet of Jesus, the Church.

God has created this world of ours with enough resources for all to not just survive but to thrive, to have an abundant life. The difficulty is that we have not always shared the resources of this world of ours in an equitable manner. The solution to this problem is for those who are blessed to share from their abundance with those who are disadvantaged. The problem is that it is all too easy to rationalize spending more and more on ourselves. I know that I find it all too easy to believe that I really need to have a new suit so I look presentable or that a new accessory for my camera would allow me to take better pictures which I can use to support my work with the church. In an effort, to establish some sort of standard for supporting its work, the church has throughout its history challenged its members to give a tithe, 10% of one's income. While that may sound overly generous, Jesus challenges us to commit ourselves and all that we have in service to God. I don't believe that means we should all take a vow of poverty or that we shouldn't be concerned about providing for the future; but I do believe that Jesus calls us to consider carefully how we use what we have been blessed with and focus on what we need rather than what we want. It is all too easy to spend all we have and then some on stuff that fills every inch of space.

As difficult as it is to get a handle on how we spend our money; it is even more difficult to be loving in our day to day interactions with individuals. In today's lesson from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus addresses dealing with conflict. He challenges us to seek to resolve our differences not through litigation or by complaining to others about how we were treated; but by seeking to settle our differences directly with the individual. If that doesn't work we are encouraged to seek someone to act as a mediator. Unfortunately, there will be some cases where nothing can resolve our differences and the best we can do is avoid further interaction with the individual. In the process, we may not only be reconciled with the individual who offended us but by our actions bear testimony to the way of love and have an impact on the actions of others.

All of this is difficult, some would say impossible for human beings in the world in which we live; but the Holy Spirit can and does transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, flawed men and women into saints.