

Wesley United Methodist Church

October 26, 2014

“What the World Needs Now Is Love.”

Matthew 22:34-40, Deuteronomy 34:1-12

There is a story about a young man and his father who had a farm. Several times a year they would make a trip to market with their oxcart loaded with vegetables. The son was an impatient person. He would always prod the ox with a stick to hurry it along. His father, however, believed in following a more leisurely gait. The son wanted to get to market, first thing the next morning in order to beat the other vendors to the best spot. The father, however, had other priorities.

At one point their way passed by the boy's uncle's house. The father stopped the ox and went in to chat with his brother for more than an hour.

When they started out on their way again, they came to a fork in the road. The young man wanted to take the left fork because it was faster, but the father turned the oxcart toward the right because it was prettier. While it was still twilight the father chose the loveliest spot of all to stop for the night. “You're more interested in flowers,” snapped the son, “than in making money.”

“That's the nicest thing you've said in a long time,” replied the father. The next morning the impatient young man awoke his father well before sunrise. They hitched up the ox and again made their way toward the city. A short distance along the way, however, they came upon another farmer whose cart was stuck in a ditch. “Let's give him a hand,” said the father. The young man protested, but he knew he might as well do his part, or they would simply be delayed much longer. By this time, it was almost eight o'clock.

Suddenly a great flash of lightning split the sky. Then there was thunder. Beyond the hills, the sky grew very dark. “Looks like a big rain in the city,” said the old man. “If we had been on time, we'd be sold out by now, grumbles the son. Take it easy,” said the old gentleman, “you'll last longer.” It wasn't until late in the afternoon that they got to the top of the hill overlooking the town. They looked down at it for a long time. Neither of them spoke. Finally the young man who had been in such a hurry said, very quietly, “I see what you mean, father.” Then they turned their cart around and drove away from what had once been the city of Hiroshima.

The actions of the young man tell us that we are so busy with our own lives we don't care about others. All we're interested in are our own affairs, our own chance of making money and getting ahead in life. We need to read the words in the New Testament in order to get our priorities rearranged. The New Testament tells us that the very reason for our being here is love. God is love. We were created from love and for love. “What the world needs now is love, sweet love,” wrote the song writer in the sixties. That song is almost a prayer. Remember how it goes? “Lord, we don't need another mountain, or a river or a valley...” what we need, he says is love. And he is right. But if there is a shortage of love in this world, it is certainly not God's fault. “See how the Father has loved us,” writes John in one of his epistles. You and I would be here all day if we tried to count the ways in which God has bombarded us with the evidence of his love. Just to start, we could name the sunshine and rain, flood and flowers, tiny babies and doting grandparents...the list goes on and on. But even more impressive than all these material blessings is the gift of God's Son. Suddenly, God's love was given form, flesh, substance.

Let's talk about Moses. Moses loved his people, the Hebrews, who lived in bondage in Egypt for over 400 years. It got him in trouble at times, not only with the Pharaoh or the Hebrews, but with God as well. However, Moses had a unique relationship with God because God loved him. He spoke with God face to face and there never was a greater prophet than Moses. Moses wasn't allowed to lead the Hebrews into the promised land but God allowed him to see it from a distance before he died. God's love for Moses was one of a kind and one thousand years later, Moses realized his dream and returned with the prophet Elijah when visited with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

I heard about a father who was getting bored reading bedtime stories for his little daughter, so he bought her a DVD player and some very polished recordings of her favorite stories. But she didn't like the records. She pleaded with her father to read the stories himself. “But I bought you that nice DVD player,” protested the father. “Yes, but the DVD player doesn't have a lap.” In Jesus Christ, God gave us his Word complete with a lap.

There he is holding a little child in his arms and blessing them. There he is dining with “Zaccheus, bringing love into a despised man's home. His arms are open for forgiveness. His hands are outstretched in healing. His lips

Speak words of hope to those in despair. And finally he hangs on a cross. "Surely this man is the Son of God," whispers the centurion. He was all that and more. St Paul writes, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself..." Clarence Jordan, in his Cotton Patch version of the Scriptures, translates it something like this: "God was in Jesus hugging the world to himself..."

Love is woven into the very fabric of creation. We are not surprised, then, that when Jesus was asked what the great commandment was, he answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like this. Thou shalt love your neighbor as yourself." We cannot escape the obligation to love, because when we cease to love, we cease being human.

There are three levels of love. The first of which is physical love, which holds people together in families.

Then there is psychic love. Psychic love includes our association in friendships, in professional and social groups, and in all those relationships which rest on community of our individual tastes.

There is a still higher level of love based on conscience. If one is walking along the road with an enemy on his right hand, and a sinner on his left, and if he can walk with them without accusing them, or if he can stop his progress to help them, then he has risen to the level of conscientious love. Such was the love which Jesus manifested and to which he summoned his followers, telling them to do good to those who hated them...

Most people love on a very primitive level--loving those who love them. But Jesus calls us to experience a very special kind of love.

Take time to love, my friends. Love those closest to you. But do more than that. Walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Learn to love every person with whom you come into contact. That kind of love can still save this world.