

**Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.**

**Love one another with mutual affection.**

Good morning, St. Dunstan's!

I love 3 x 5 cards.

Sprinkled throughout my house one will find a sundry 3 x 5 cards: sitting on a table or tucked in a book, stuck in a drawer. I think they are the perfect size to jot down a grocery list. Or tape a reminder on a cabinet door. Over at my office, here at St. Dunstan's, I brought some of the office supplies I had when I was at Seminary. Paper clips, my favorite pens, and of course 3 x 5 cards.

Some of my 3 x 5 cards were used, they had previous assignments on one side, others had Spanish verbs. The last 20 years or so, whenever I come across a scripture that jumps off of the page, I simply reach for a 3 x 5 card write it down.

As I was praying about which verses to preach this Sunday from our lectionary this morning, (as clergy, we get to choose- Old Testament, the Psalms, the epistle reading or the Gospel)

I begin reading the Gospel of Matthew. The gospels are so rich with information about Jesus and how we should live our lives. But I noticed this 3 x 5 card sitting to the right -there on my desk next to my laptop. On the one side were some notes, then I turned it over and I found this scripture:

**"Love** from the center of who you are. Don't fake it."

Romans 12:9 from the Message.

Hmmm. Romans 12: 9-21 are the verses for today's epistle reading. Okay. I'll preach on Romans 12!

Can you believe this is the first Sunday in September I have been here two months! Time is flying!

When I first arrived in early July, I asked Fr. Roman if I could quote from the Message.

He said, "Leesa but of course. Eugene Peterson is incredible."

Some of you may not know much about this Bible translation called The Message. I want to share with you just a little bit about it and Eugene Peterson before we dive into the scripture.

The Message is an easy to read Bible version, translated from the original Greek and Hebrew Scriptures by scholar, pastor, author, and poet, Eugene Peterson.

The Message was thoroughly reviewed and approved by twenty biblical scholars.

It combines the authority of God's Word with the cadence and energy of conversational English.

After teaching at a seminary then serving thirty years to church ministry, Petersen felt frustrated with the **unimaginative** way his congregants were treating their Bibles reading. They didn't understand what it said so they just didn't read it.

Eugene Petersen decided to do something, he translated the whole bible himself. It took him almost 10 years, but he translated and created a new version with God's help called: *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*—

Which has sold over 20 million copies. Just wanted you to know...

Let me do a review of last week's epistle. Romans 12: 1-8. Paul encouraged the young in the faith, believers in Rome, not conform to their surroundings. Why?

Because in the Greco-Roman world, life was incredibly difficult!

There wasn't any refinancing. If you owed someone money, you offered yourself to pay for that debt as a slave and slaves had no rights. Women had few if any rights. They were expected to stay in their homes and produce heirs. A woman certainly could not speak in a public forum much less express herself. Greco-Roman world exuded a chauvinistic mindset.

Children were treated sub-human.

Hatred and revenge were celebrated as violence, death and destruction became commonplace.

Here's a poem that surmised how the many people may have felt during this time in history:

Pretty Ugly  
by Abdullah Shoaib

I'm very ugly  
So don't try to convince me that  
I am a very beautiful person  
Because at the end of the day  
I hate myself in every single way  
And I'm not going to lie to myself by saying  
There is beauty inside of me that matters  
So rest assured I will remind myself  
That I am a worthless, terrible person  
And nothing you say will make me believe  
I still deserve love  
Because no matter what

I am not good enough to be loved  
And I am in no position to believe that  
Beauty does exist within me  
Because whenever I look in the mirror I always think  
Am I as ugly as people say?

In this polytheistic society, the counter-cultural teachings of Jesus were like a cool breeze in a relentless summer. We can relate to that!

When the Roman believers encountered the life-giving message of Jesus of Nazareth, they encountered an entirely new perspective on how life could be lived. They began an utterly different way of interacting within their culture.

Because... they were gifted with a new perspective. They received God's amazing grace by the powerful working of God's Spirit through the hearing of the good news of the teachings of Jesus. Their entire lives: hearts and minds were **transformed** by producing a shiny new faith in Christ as the risen Lord.

You and I need our perspectives to be freshen.

We get stuck in habits of how we respond or our behavior patterns some need altering. Sometimes, we just get lazy and forget or for that matter, we just get selfish in our responses to others. That is why it is good to identify the guiding principles that are the tenets of our faith. Paul reminds his readers that behavior has an impact on others.

Love changes people.

The love Jesus demonstrated for us, changes us.

When the Roman believers began to practice these new spiritual disciplines, not for the sake of the disciplines themselves but as tools for producing breakthroughs in their daily everyday lives, they began to change their **entire culture.**

You see, transformed people transform communities.

St. Paul was simply echoing the teaching of Jesus.

In our Gospel reading this morning, we hear Jesus say,

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, will find it.

Following Jesus is simply counter cultural. It goes against the grain of everything society promotes- you got to get ahead, you must take of yourself, you can only depend on you. We buy into that mindset of self-centeredness, work ourselves into believing it, buy all of this stuff we don't really need, feel smug and superior to the “others” and thankful we're not in their situation, then something happens... life knocks on you for a loop:

“Excuse me, are you Mrs. Lewis? I have some news to tell you about...”

Fill in the blank with your name and your news. I have a hunch that everyone one in this room has experienced that gut-wrenching conversation at one point or another.

**But** if we believe and are grounded in our faith, our roots will hold us.

We have choices on how we react. That's the beauty of life in Christ. God gives us a choices. We are not full of AI/ artificial intelligence. We have real intelligence- or at least most of the time.

We get to choose- to love, to do good, to serve others, to pray.

Romans 12: 9-21 From the Message version, goes like this.

Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it.

Run for dear life from evil;

hold on for dear life to good.

Be good friends who love deeply;

practice playing second fiddle.

Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame.

Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant.

Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder.

Help needy Christians.

be inventive in hospitality.

Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath.

Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy;

share tears when they're down.

Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up.

Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone.

If you've got it in you, get along with everybody.

Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

The poem, "Pretty Ugly" is reverse poem written in 2018. Listen to these same words from the poem I read earlier but listen with a fresh perspective,

Am I as ugly as people say?  
Because whenever I look in the mirror, I always think  
Beauty does exist within me.  
And I am in no position to believe that  
I am not good enough to be loved.  
Because no matter what,  
I still deserve love.  
And nothing you say will make me believe  
That I am a worthless, terrible person.  
So, rest assured I will remind myself  
There is beauty inside of me that matters.  
And I'm not going to lie to myself by saying  
I hate myself in every single way.  
Because at the end of the day  
I am a very beautiful person.  
So don't try to convince me that  
I'm very ugly.

So, my dear friends, remember- You too can have a fresh perspective, you have a choice. I want to encourage you to hear the beauty in the perspective that Jesus brings and choose Jesus.