

# Love All the People

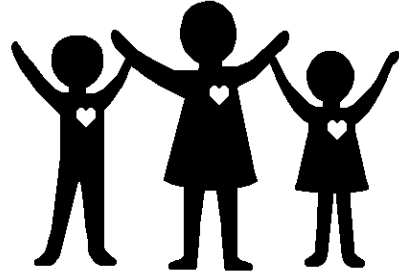
A Sermon on Living

Drawn from Matthew 10 and Romans 6

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Hudson United Methodist Church

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This week's theme is Love all the people. It is the last of a four-part sermon series which began with Christ's great commission to "Go, therefore and make disciples. . . ." (Matthew 28:16-20) Deacon Susan preached the next sermon on "See all the people" as we began a slow three sermons' read of Matthew 10. Last week our theme was "Hear all the people" and it ended with a homework assignment for us all. We were to daily write down up to three things we heard about God, and up to three things we heard other people say "about me" as an individual. It was okay if the one thing was "silence." The attempt was to lead us to listen as something we do. If you either did not try the exercise or if like me you fell off the wagon, you are forgiven, and I hope this sermon still speaks to you. And due to the wonders of both podcast and PDF files, if you want to try the exercise after hearing this sermon, you can find both the print sermon and the YouTube podcast sermon by going to [UMCHudson.org](http://UMCHudson.org).

A desire for us to be a church that "Hears All the People" was certainly a huge part of that exercise. But it was not the whole thing. Part of the reason for asking you to try a spiritual practice as homework to link that sermon with this one. Listening will lead to speech. Speech is a way you can "Love all the people." What did you learn by listening to other people to say something about God or about you?

(Here is some space to think.)

Let me share what I learned by doing the homework. Before I fell away on Thursday evening, I had only one day where I heard anyone say anything about God! I did exclude Sunday morning by beginning to listen after worship just like you, but the only day I heard

anyone say anything about God was Wednesday when, via Zoom, I attended both the small group and the 7 p.m. prayer and communion service. I heard more than three things about God. What that long list all in common was deep amazement at God's great love for everyone. One comment about God was gave us cause to pause. It came from one person sharing how deeply touched she was to realize that God is even with the homeless person.

On Sunday and Tuesday, I heard only one thing said to me about me. On Monday no one said anything to me about me. That is a total of two comments about me over three days. On Wednesday, the same day I heard more than three things about God, I heard more than three things about me! And they were all kind!

I count it as a blessing that the only negative voice I heard comment on me last week was my own inner voice. But since writing down my thoughts about me was not part of the assignment, those thoughts were not recorded. But, by both training and experience I know that the experience of only positive comments from other people about me for four days running is not an experience shared by all people. There was a time as a grade school student when I had an instrumental music teacher who yelled at me every weekly lesson. He even wrote negative comments in my notebook that I took to and from lessons. The memory still hurts to even write that now. For twenty plus years, I pushed that negative experience far down until as an adult it came back on its own while I was doing counseling with a spiritual director I trusted. After she heard me tell a fuller version of that story, Dorothy's kind response was that I am now an adult who would now comfort that wounded child. Her kind words that needed no notebook to be remembered. Her words were truly "a cup of cold water offered in Jesus name." (Matthew 10:40-42)

Likewise, in the entries on my list of unsolicited comments about me both affirmed my efforts to be like Christ and inspired me to live up to how others saw me. Those comments were all gifts, just as Dorothy's response was. Hearing positive comments has contributed to a desire to become an even better Christian. Offering words of kindness are something we can all do to "Love all the people."

To love all the people, we must take Christ's teachings to heart and apply them in our every day lives. We may think loving all the people requires some grand gesture, a major mission trip, an amazing Christmas Eve performance. True enough, sometimes loving all the people does require grand gestures, but not often. More often loving all the people is practicing the small daily blessing of being a blessing for another person. If you have been blessed to be loved by someone else in your family—a grandparent, a parent, your spouse, a child, a grandchild—you know that real love is far more than an occasional grand gesture. What sustains these relationships are the loving acts found in listening and speaking that shows your

loved one they have been fully heard. Is loving another person a big party once a year, or is it regular daily or weekly communication? Must one choose?

There is one line in today's reading from Paul's Letter to Rome that I want to bring to our attention, "What then shall we sin all the more that grace may abound? May it never be!" (Romans 6:15) What great use of sarcasm! That verse has always tickled me because Paul clearly said we don't have to sin in order to experience Christ's great grace. Nor do we have to sin before another person can experience the love of God through each of us who follow Christ. It is with humor and exaggeration that this verse swings us into considering living as those who have experienced grace. Paul saw us in a new way of being where we do not need to keep sinning. And so once again Paul's best sarcasm ever, "What then shall we sin all the more that grace may abound? May it never be!" (Romans 6:15)

Mixing Jesus' teaching captured in Matthew's gospel and Paul's practical advice will continue in our worship through to the last Sunday of summer. Both Jesus and Paul teach using a rising waves of crescendos, building from their first point to their next major point rather than telling us "what they are going to tell us, telling us, and then telling us what they told us." When Jesus taught us to act like him, he said "whoever welcomes you welcomes me." (Matthew 10: 40) According to Paul, grace abounds when we give "... the gift of God which is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6: 23) As we embrace our identity as Christians, we give the gift of love Christ gave us.

Imagine Christ greeting you today, right now. Does he greet you with condemnation? I hope you said no, because according to the Bible, that is a wrong answer. Christ never came to condemn us, only to redeem us. (John 3:17) We could see Christ through a fireman in all his gear, or an emergency room doctor wearing in her protective mask and gloves; each a person who comes to us in our deepest physical need to save our bodies. Can you imagine being in trouble and having either a firefighter or an ER doctor first greeting you with "Now what have you done?" They come to us knowing we need their help. They use kind words, comforting words, assuring words as they greet us and freely give us the gift of their life saving skills.

Likewise, as Christians, we should welcome others in our life as Christ welcomes us. Mother Teresa famously said that when she greeted a leper in Calcutta, she always remembered that she was greeting Christ. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said over and over that we don't overcome hate with hate, we overcome hate with love. St. Paul wrote "... the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) As Christians whenever we greet another person, we offer the gift of meeting Christ.

Now that is a big idea! It is also a very practical way to show love to all the people. We can certainly use this idea with those we already love, especially those we know who reject

Christ because they think Christianity is all about judging others' behavior. But we can also use this big, practical idea with total strangers. No matter who another person is in relationship to you and me, they are all a person in need of welcome from Christ. They all need the gift of eternal life. How we greet them should always be an invitation for them to take their next step with Christ as we walk with them.

Remember that listening homework assignment from last week that you may or may not have done? A funny thing happened on my way home from church after preaching that sermon. I did have the advantage of knowing the homework was linking last week's "Hear All the People" sermon with this week's "Love All the People" sermon. A morning of leading worship always leaves me both tired in a good way, and really hungry for a good meal. So last week, I chose to take care of both my tiredness and my hunger by driving through *Panda Express* on the other side of I-94. Because I was tired, I was not very good at ordering clearly into the drive-by microphone. But the young woman on the other end was patient with our disembodied conversation and helped me get my bowl of Chicken Mushroom with white rice ordered. I cannot say my behavior was sinful, but do know that listening to my tired voice over a microphone with freeway noise in the background had to be difficult for her. I decided to try this week's sermon practical advice out before I did my homework. I pulled up to the window to pay and get my lunch. As I thanked her for being a patient person her face went from neutral to a wide smile. I wondered if perhaps she too was a Christian intentionally trying to love all the people who drove past her window? She certainly looked pleased to be caught being patient.

Listening deeply and responding with love, even just an honest compliment, is a small step of grace, a perfect way to love all the people. It works with your family. It works with strangers. It works with every relationship in between. This week, challenge yourself to love all the people by greeting each person you meet as though they were Christ. Show them the love you have felt by the way Christ has welcomed you. Don't worry, it's not more homework. It is The Way to Love All the People.

Amen.