



Calvary Presbyterian Church
Sunday, April 30, 2023

LOVE WITH SKIN ON: An Intense Sense of Togetherness

Pastor Eyde Mabanglo

SCRIPTURE—April 30 - Acts 2:42-47

⁴²The community continually committed themselves to learning what the apostles taught them, gathering for fellowship, breaking bread, and praying.

*⁴³Everyone felt a sense of awe because the apostles were doing many signs and wonders among them. ⁴⁴There was **an intense sense of togetherness** among all who believed; they shared all their material possessions in trust.*

*⁴⁵They sold any possessions and goods that did not benefit the community and used the money to help everyone in need. ⁴⁶They were unified as they worshiped at the temple day after day. In homes, they broke bread and shared meals with glad and generous hearts. ⁴⁷**The new disciples praised God, and they enjoyed the goodwill of all the people of the city.** Day after day the Lord added to their number everyone who was experiencing liberation.*

SERMON

My son is visiting today, and I wanted to talk about my Dad's side of the family for a moment. There may be some things that Eddie (named after Edward Paul Breakey and his father Edward Paul Breakey Sr) doesn't know about the Breakey Family – French Huguenots that escaped France and moved to Ireland. I come from a long line of Presbyterian Pastors in Ireland (complete with big foreheads and bushy mustaches).

One ancestor is Norman Breakey, who is “best” known (but NOT well known) for inventing the paint roller in 1946 (Toronto). **And you’re welcome.**

Apparently, we all used paint brushes until 1940—can you believe it? Norman couldn’t make enough of them to make any money, so someone named Sherman Williams or something must have made a fortune from their own design of Norman’s invention. Norman Breakey may not have been an entrepreneur, but we share another relative that was...

John Breakey left Ireland and the family business of bleaching linens in the late 1800’s. He ran a timber business, built a railroad to support that business, became a banker and also built Saint Helene Catholic Church in Breakeyville (Quebec) in 1909.

When I was younger, I was very proud of Breakeyville and all of John Breakey’s accomplishments, but as I become “woke” (and I am **woke** I guess) I started to assume that he built his business, he name a town after himself, and he built a church to simply make a name for himself. I wondered if he was just filled with arrogance and hubris, but after some authentic curiosity and deeper research, I discovered that he built the church so that local mill workers could worship closer to home (possibly to keep his workers in town on Sundays??).

There’s an axiom that my friend taught me that helps me when I find myself in situations where I make assumptions about other people, and/or when I am tempted to be too quick to judge. Probably not a problem for you, but it is for me.

Pastor LeAnn told a story about her sons playing in a hotel swimming pool while on vacation. The older two were throwing around the younger one per usual as siblings enjoying a summer day. After a while, two men from the side of the pool told the older boys to leave the third boy alone. You see LeAnn is white and her youngest was white, but the two older boys were black. It may not have been obvious to onlookers that they were siblings.

I asked LeAnn what she did when that happened, and she said, “I try to assume benevolence”. She tries to understand where people are coming from and respond to that rather than in anger or frustration.

Assume Benevolence has been an axiom that I try to apply to my personal life, my transitional ministry as well as try to encourage the congregations that I work with. It's applying common decency when common decency isn't so common anymore.

Who decides what is common, decent, normal, acceptable, comfortable?

Common Decency, Common Sense, Commonwealth, Common Courtesy, Common Law...ordinary...everyday...Commonalities are those things shared by a dominant culture, but what about those outside of that culture. Who decides for them. The take away from our passage from Acts 2 is that for all the diversity represented in this scene, God reveals God's love in all of the everyday ways.

Divine Love lives out in common ways.

Richard Mouw wrote Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World (1992). He quotes Mother Teresa...

"I have no doubt that Mother Teresa would gladly endorse Kuyper's manifesto: 'There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, 'This is mine! This belongs to me!'" She knew that Jesus has conquered sin. She believed deeply in the ultimate triumph of the cross. But Mother Teresa did not see the square inches Jesus has redeemed as territory that we must now triumphantly claim as our prize. She knew that many of those square inches are presently occupied by people with stinking, rotting flesh, by grieving parents, by frightened children—the abused, the abandoned, the persecuted and the desperately poor. And she was convinced that our "claiming" those places in the name of Christ means that we must go out to join him "in the distressing disguise" as he makes the agony of the suffering ones his very own. The square inches for which Christ died are still often very lonely and desolate places. And we must be willing to take our place in those situations, knowing that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

We are hosting a Taco Salad Bar next Wednesday night. What would happen if 3,000 people showed up?! Chaos. Holy Chaos, but chaos. The

expense, the dishes, the amount of paper plates. Would there be enough chopped black olives, chips, cheese, beverages?

We all want the church to grow, but what would happen if God added to our number every day?... Holy chaos. People with different dietary needs, diverse languages, various financial situations, polarizing politics, opposing views of key scriptures, etc.

We focus on inclusion and diversity not just to highlight commonalities but to acknowledge the differences—making room for difference as we make room at the table—God’s table. And divine love shows up in the common things, we celebrate that our common things are everyday things...and that even they are different and have value and worth and show us more about the height, length, width and breath of God’s love. It isn’t that we discard the differences and focus only on what we have in common, but that we focus on what is common or familiar in all our life experiences and learn more about our human siblings.

Pentecost (the scene in Acts 2) requires us to assume benevolence and make room for difference when God is adding to our numbers. We assume the benevolence of God as well and that the Spirit of Christ is changing lives...changing us.

We cannot hope to bring about effective change unless we are willing to BE changed.~Richard Muow

Assuming benevolence is a gracious way of seeing Christ in every face—thereby seeing our human siblings in every face.

Recently, I received an unkind message from a family member. It is not wise for us to respond with the first (or second—maybe even the 14th) thing that we would like to say. I waited and responded with kindness and benevolence several days later. I shared with a confidant how I responded, and she said: *gracious, as always*. And I would say: *yeah, not always*. *I told her that grace takes three days*.

If Jesus took three days to rise, then I can wait three days and respond to unkindness with grace and benevolence.

In 1943, Father Flanagan started Boys Town (a residential camp for youth in Nebraska). The song "He Ain't heavy, He's my Brother" (1969) reminded him of seeing a camper carrying another boy on his back.

Lyrics are:

*The road is long
With many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where?
Who knows where?
But I'm strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother*

*So on we go
His welfare is my concern
No burden is he to bear
We'll get there
For I know
He would not encumber me
He ain't heavy, he's my brother*

*If I'm laden at all
I'm laden with sadness
That everyone's heart
Isn't filled with the gladness
Of love for one another*

*It's a long, long road
From which there is no return
While we're on the way to there
Why not share?
And the load
Doesn't weigh me down at all
He ain't heavy, he's my brother
He's my brother
He ain't heavy, he's my brother*

Today, I read a FB post from my daughter's former band teacher that told a story about her young daughter Claire:

"Claire got to 'spin the wheel' in class today. Her prize was lunch in the classroom with a friend. When she was telling me about it, I said...'Let me guess...you are going to choose _____" (since this girl is one of her best friends in the class).

And she looks at me and smiles and says 'I picked _____!"

Me: 'That's surprising...why?"

Claire: "Well, he doesn't really have friends in class and most the kids are bothered by him, including me, but I don't think anyone else will ever pick him to eat lunch with them in the classroom, so I want to pick him.;"

On Pentecost, we hear about how many believers gathered together speaking different languages, requiring different accommodations, from various backgrounds, political proclivities, and prejudices—yet they experienced an intense sense of community. Let us strive to be that community by the power of God's spirit—inviting change, even if that means changing us. Let us presume that God's spirit is benevolent in bringing differences into our lives and seeing the depth and width of that love in our midst.

Every day, the Spirit *spins the wheel* for us and brings numerous opportunities to meet our human siblings, opportunities to be **Love with Skin On**, opportunities to accept invitations to bring our whole selves to a wide table and embody the Spirit of Christ so the world might know the God who loves all.

May it be so. May it be so.

