

Church Service for 08.27.17
Lori Nicholson, Celebrant

Bible Readings

First Reading: Matthew 13:12

“For to the one who has, will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” (English Standard Version)

Second Reading: John 13:34-35

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (English Standard Version)

Sermon: How to Be “Love” in a Challenging World

What do YOU do on a regular basis to make the world a better place? Take a moment to really think about your answer. If I were to call on you, what would your answer be? [PAUSE.] It’s a big question. Let me make it a little simpler. What will you plan to do to make the world a better place today *specifically*? [PAUSE.] Many of you are probably thinking, “I come to church to zone out and rest; why is she making me think?!” Ha! No! This is an interactive sermon! Many of you probably thought BIG, right? Ending world hunger...clothing the poor...housing the homeless. And those are INCREDIBLY WORTHY, IMPORTANT goals. And...they feel overwhelming. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t tackle those issues; indeed, it’s our moral imperative to help our fellow human beings, in those ways and others. Today I’m going to talk about how each of us can help create a better world—in every way, in every day—by taking 100% personal responsibility for our thoughts, emotions, and actions.

There are a lot of actions taking place in the world right now that feel unloving—racial tensions, especially between cops and young black men; battling belief systems about the legal and social rights of those in the LGBT+ community; political strife between liberals and conservatives, both here in the United States and around the world; the ugliness of white nationalists, and their clash in Charlottesville, VA with anti-racist protestors; pervasive anti-Muslim bashing. These are only some examples of people acting in a manner counter to Love. And what do all of these actions have in common? Fear. They all stem from fear. A cop shoots an unarmed black man whose car is broken down on the side of the road out of FEAR of whether he is armed, or what he might do to the cop. There has been more hate-violence-related homicides of LGBT people thus far in 2017 than in all of 2016 (excluding the Pulse shootings); this has happened out of FEAR of what those with different gender orientations or different sexuality may represent to the mainstream. Hate speech towards Muslims and other groups is borne out of FEAR of “others” who are “not like us.” As noted psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross said:

“There are only two emotions: love and fear. All positive emotions come from love, all negative emotions from fear. From love flows happiness, contentment, peace, and joy. From fear comes anger, hate, anxiety and guilt. It's true that there are only two primary emotions, love and fear. But it's more accurate to say that there is only love or fear, for we cannot feel these two emotions together, at exactly the same time. They're opposites. If we're in fear, we are not in a place of love. When we're in a place of love, we cannot be in a place of fear.”

— Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

I call these emotional reactions “Love” versus “Not Love.” Yet I agree with Kübler-Ross that “Not Love” is almost exclusively a result of fearfulness. Fearfulness causes our primitive, reptilian brain—which is

concerned with survival above all else—coupled with our amygdala—which is part of the limbic system of the brain, our emotional center—to flood our body with stress hormones, throwing us into a state of fight, flight, or freeze. Survival and safety become our primary focus. And historically, one of the best ways to stay safe and alive was to BELONG to a group: to be part of a social structure—a family or community—that had our back. Our brains are constantly on the lookout for ways in which we can BELONG. In contrast to this fear response, we make our best decisions when we’re operating out of our neocortex. This is the most evolved part of our brain, and our pre-frontal cortex in particular allows us to plan, innovate, solve challenges, and be the higher-thinking visionaries that we like to be. We could refer to these two states as the “Fear-Mongering Brain” and the “Visionary Brain.” Or perhaps the “Not-Love Brain” and the “Love Brain.” No matter how kind, loving, and generous we are when we are in our “Love Brain,” all of that flies out the window when the fear kicks in. It’s easy to come to church on Sundays and feel connected and loving. We want the whole world to get along, and we want to be part of that higher-self experience—that CONNECTION to God. It’s less easy to feel loving and connected when somebody speeds in front of us and cuts us off on the highway, or when somebody directs nasty speech or actions towards us. In those situations, the “Not-Love Brain” kicks in and yells, “Danger! Stop caring about others, and save yourself!” And yet, continuing to care about others—to LOVE OTHERS—is *exactly* what Jesus calls us to do. His commandment to LOVE ONE ANOTHER transcends all situations—all types of people, all types of words, all types of actions. He says, “Love one another.” He doesn’t say “Love everyone except homosexuals.” He doesn’t say “Love everyone as long as they look like you or think like you.” He doesn’t say “Love everyone who comes from your country only.” He said, “LOVE EVERYONE.” Full stop. This is Christ’s most important teaching, in my opinion, and Christianity’s central tenet. However, I’m concerned that many Christians are confused about this teaching. I’ve spoken to several

people, who consider themselves Christian, who have said things like, “Well I don’t like people from _____ (fill in the blank with the name of a particular country).” I’ve had conversations with other people who consider themselves Christians who have said, “We allow homosexuals in our church, but we don’t acknowledge their way of living.” Are these comments “Love” or “Not Love”? This is not a hypothetical question. This is an interactive sermon! That’s right: “Not Love.” And if Christians are commanded to speak and act in Love, are those words Christian or un-Christian? We are meant to be better than our “Fear-Mongering Brains.” We’re meant to act out of our “Visionary” “Loving Brains,” even when—especially when—that feels hard.

I trust that by this point, my selection of the scripture reading from John 13:34-35—Jesus’s commandment for us to love one another—makes sense with my message. Love one another; that’s what we’re called to do. However, what does all of this have to do with Matthew 13:12? “For to the one who has, will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” Jesus’s words, as reported in Matthew, are so important that they’re not only presented in Chapter 13, Verse 12. They’re also presented, almost word-for-word, in Matthew 25:29—with one small, but significant change. He makes the message more universal. Instead of saying “For to the one who has, will more be given,” He says “For to everyone who has, will more be given.” This is a universal message. This is a message that applies to each and every one of us. And it’s a message that, in my opinion, has been misinterpreted by so many ministers. I don’t mean that in an arrogant way. At first glance, it is a strange teaching. Why would those whom already have a lot be given more? And why would those whom are struggling and in need, have items or belongings taken away? Well, allow me to take you on a journey of discovery for a few minutes.

We tend to feel that we treat others in a particular way and they react; or they treat us in a particular way, and we react. When really, the truth is much more empowering. The truth is that each of us creates our lives out of our belief systems in every moment of every day. You are the author of your own story. You are the painter on your life's canvas. You are the director of your own play. You have much more power over your life and what you create in your life than you might think.

We all have an energy field around us, and we've all felt when someone has violated that energy field against our will. Think about the energy and emotions you feel when you think about a "close-talker" — someone who stands right in your face when talking to you. [PAUSE] You might feel like they're infringing on your "personal space" and that's because they ARE! Now allow yourself to experience the energy of a loved one—a partner or child—standing that close to you. [PAUSE] Ah! That feels much more connected and loving, right? This energy field is very powerful, because we hold our beliefs *and false beliefs* in our energy field, and we create our individual reality out of those beliefs and false beliefs.

Let me give you an example. Have you ever met someone and IMMEDIATELY felt great love towards them—a kinship? Yes! What is likely happening is that you are feeling beliefs and characteristics in them that you also feel AND LOVE within yourself. By the way, neurophysiologists have found that this is due to "mirror neurons;" these are neurons in our brains that fire both when we act and when we observe the same action performed by another—as if you're "mirroring" the other person and performing that same action along with them. I like to refer to these as "empathy neurons." Likewise, have you ever met someone and immediately felt a dislike, distrust, or even disgust towards them? Yes, of course! You are recognizing feelings, beliefs, and characteristics within them that you also feel within yourself, but you JUDGE negatively those characteristics within

yourself. So, that person is mirroring back to you aspects of yourself that you DO NOT LIKE. That likely triggers a STRONG EMOTIONAL REACTION within you. If or when that person says or does something that triggers this strong emotional reaction, the tendency is to think to oneself: “That person is so mean or hurtful or unkind”—or whatever the judgment is that we hold. When truly, that person who challenges you the most is a very strong healing agent for you. It takes a lot of courage for that person to stand in your field and help you bring your untruths about yourself to light—knowing that they are likely to catch the brunt of your emotional reaction. Because most people actually project their feelings instead of FEELING them. And it’s in the FEELING of them that we heal.

So let me illustrate that concept with a story...

A man—let’s call him Jack—holds a false belief about himself in his energy field. He believes that he’s not very smart. He goes on job interview after job interview, but he cannot land a job, and in fact, he is likely to be told by the interviewers: “You’re not smart enough for this job.” They probably wouldn’t say it like that. They would probably say, “We don’t believe you have the skills necessary to do this job.” OR “You don’t have the right educational background.” OR “We found somebody else better qualified to do the job.” No matter how it’s stated, Jack is going to feel TRIGGERED. He’s going to feel angry and/or sad and/or frustrated (and frustration is just a combination of anger and sadness). Each time he FEELS that emotion—really gives it time and space to be felt—he heals a little bit of his false belief. Jack will eventually get to the point where he is FED

UP with others telling him that he's not smart enough. He'll think to himself, "I REFUSE to live this way any longer," and he'll release that false belief about himself. (If you are interested in learning a couple of tools for shifting your emotional state to a more positive outlook and outcome, I'm happy to stay after the service for 10-15 minutes to teach you a couple of techniques.)

By the way, once Jack lets go of his false belief, he'll quickly find a job—one that requires "smarts" and one that he's earned through his emotional processing. At the beginning of his job search, Jack was sending out energy signals to the recruiters and hiring managers; he was projecting out his false belief that he wasn't good enough for the job. And their energy fields acted like antennas, picking up his energy signals. The recruiters and hiring managers may have really wanted to hire Jack, but as soon as their energy fields picked up his false belief that was being sent by his energy field, they probably thought or FELT, "Oh, okay, I guess I'm not supposed to hire you." This usually happens on the subconscious level, but some people who are very empathic or intuitive, will get a "gut feeling" that Jack just isn't the right "fit" for their job. However, as soon as his "false belief" is released, Jack can then project the energy of competence, education, and skill—all of the energy that the hiring managers are looking for in a job candidate—attracting his perfect job into his life.

This process is often referred to as the Law of Attraction. There are several great books about the Law of Attraction; two of them are The Secret by Rhonda Byrne, and Ask and it Is Given: Learning to Manifest Your Desires by Esther Hicks and Jerry Hicks.

So people who hold feelings of love, connectedness, and abundance will attract to them more love, connectedness, and abundance. Likewise, those who hold feelings of victimhood, bitterness, and lack will attract to themselves more victimhood, bitterness, and lack. Or as Jesus said, “For to the one who has, will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” As Maya Angelou said, “I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.” The same is true for our emotions. Hold better thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and create better actions, events, and outcomes.

It’s so important to understand that the only way in which we create is through our beliefs and feelings, so our beliefs and thoughts have to be creating the feelings of what we want. If you focus on what you don’t want, you get what you don’t want. If you focus on what you DO want, you get what you DO want. This is how the Law of Attraction works. So, focus on what it is that you WANT!

So, now I ask you the question: “How you can be “Love” in this challenging world? How can you and I bring more love into this world—in service to ourselves and others? Two major ways, each of which is represented by one of our scripture readings today.

First, if you have thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that are “Not Love,” you will attract more “Not Love” into the world. If you have fear, you attract fearful words, actions, and events, for example. If you hold tight to thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about “Love,” you will only attract more “Love” into the world. So the first thing you can do is to feel and

process through your emotional triggers. If you feel anger, process your anger. If you feel grief, process your grief. If you feel jealousy, process your jealousy, so you don't attract a situation into your life that would be jealousy-inducing. When you take 100% personal responsibility for your own beliefs and emotional processing, you bring yourself out of the state of "Not Love" and back into the state of "Love."

Second, see everyone around you as a loveable human being, who may or may not be acting in a loving manner in that moment. Stop creating "Us" and "Them" categories. The homosexual man in the grocery store may be your boss's son. The African-American woman at the post office may be your child's soon-to-be girlfriend. The Muslim man on the street may be the doctor you see to heal an injury or illness. I feel like I don't need to entreat this congregation toward open-mindedness. In fact, the open-mindedness of this church's members and leaders is part of what attracted us to this church. However, it's much more difficult to be open-minded and loving about those whose actions we deem despicable. And truly, the actions of the neo-Nazis or AltRight or white supremacists—or whatever it is they choose to call themselves—in Charlottesville were truly despicable. Running over peaceful protestors (or anyone, for that matter) is never acceptable, and we should always stand against that type of hatred and violence. And yet, if we meet that violence with violence of our own, then we are energetically the same. We are called to deplore their actions, while allowing our higher selves to love them as fellow human beings. And THAT'S a huge undertaking and responsibility, which likely requires a lot of emotional processing by each of us to find that seed of love within ourselves. For my part, I feel they are meant to demonstrate for us what "Not Love" is, so that we can better stand up for "Love"; so that we can speak more clearly the words of "Love"; and so we can better embody "Love."

Treat everyone as you'd like to be treated. Allow "The Golden Rule" to rule your life. **BE** Love to Create More Love. And work to see the

Godliness in all of your fellow humans. These are the ways in which we can live in a Christ-like manner, bringing more “Love” to our hearts, our homes, our communities, and the world.