

Nov 3, 2024

Hearts of LOVE

I said 4 weeks ago that the news we consume sometimes consumes us. And boy that's been jacked up more & more the closer we get to Election Day on Tuesday, Amen?

Well over the weeks of this series, together we have found ways to tell deeply Good News for all people by filtering our interactions—our thoughts, our words, our deeds...through the lenses of kindness, compassion, humility & respect...and today we add the lens of love.

This morning's scripture reminds us of how we are called, indeed COMMANDED to live our life as the people of God—Love God, Love others, Love ourselves. Is it possible to put love out there...as **always, always** the first impulse for interpretation of this life together?

Well let's hear what Jesus has to say about this from Mt 22:34-40:

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees,
they gathered together, and one of them, an expert in the law,
asked Jesus a question to test him.

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

Jesus said to him, ““You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

This is the greatest and first commandment.

And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

This is the Word of God for the People of God. Thanks be to God.

Friends, as this series draws to a close, we may feel more...or less resolved in our openness to each other. Loving our neighbors—including relatives, coworkers, acquaintances, strangers—as ourselves is no simple task. Especially in such a divisive time that we face as a nation.

The Golden Rule we have explored these past weeks from both Lk & Mt's Gospels isn't easy. “To do unto others as we would have them do unto us”...is no simple task. Loving others, especially our enemies, is hard. So Jesus reminds us today:

~We need God.

~We need the love of God to show us...mercy and strength to love as God loves.

~We need the story of Jesus—the one who loved across all the lines that had been drawn in the society of his day...but who also stood up for the least and the lost.

~We need faith that no matter the strain of differing positions, ideologies, theologies, policies, and yes...politics, we will move forward in love.

Oh friends, disagreeing need not be at odds with love and grace. And indeed, our world depends on all of us working for a better world...One filled with more kindness, compassion, humility, respect, & love--Even if we are the only ones...

That's why we are called by Christ to love our neighbor in today's passage to respect one another, to have compassion for one another, To live in humility and respect of one another.

In and through Christ, I am persuaded that God loves ALL human beings, Amen? As Jeremiah said last week and I want to add to his litany:

~Whether your Methodist, Catholic, Baptist or Lutheran—God loves you.

~Whether you're Asian, African, Anglo, Hispanic, Native American, Caribbean, or Pacific Islander...God LOVES YOU!

~Whether you're a democrat, republican or independent—God loves you! God loves EVERYONE.

God's heart is that big...that inclusive...that forgiving...that surprising! Go loves you...loves me...God loves ALL! And yet, far too often it seems, we have a "Do Unto Other" problem.

This hard Golden Rule that says we should treat each other well. This greatest commandment to Love God w/everything you & I have, & all that we are...& the 2nd commandment that follows immediately—Love your neighbor as yourself! As Christians we know these to be the essential teachings of Jesus. So if we are looking to get a sense of what Jesus cares about the most, you would look at these verses. And yeah, we've all heard it before, but hear again verse 40 before moving on. Jesus said: "On these 2 commandments hang all the Law & the prophets."

That's Jesus's way of saying *connecting with God and with the plight, the needs, the care of one's neighbors...is the very summation of all holy scripture. This is the heart of it. The heart is LOVE.*

I think of this as Paul wrote to the followers in Corinth: "And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

This is the Center that Holds, the center upon which all things, all faith, all conviction is entrusted by Christ: love. Love for God, neighbor, self. That's the Gospel message. Nothing exists without that at its core. Jesus is naming the whole faith paradigm is built on this synergy of love between us and God, and between us and all of our neighbors. Nothing works, nothing counts as *faith*, that isn't bound up in this wide, expansive embrace of love.

However, most of us are running around with a "do unto others...as they've already done to me" response. One that can be either positive or negative. Since you have hurt me...I'm gonna hurt you. Since you forgave me...well I guess I'll forgive you. BUT only because you did to me first!

Or some could be saying "How dare you be uncivil toward the people who have done you wrong?"—a holier than thou response. We aren't just shaming each other. We're shaming people for shaming people who shame people.

None of it really embodies this spirit of love and heart-filled, empathy-led action into a hurting and needy world, a world full of neighbors who are different, so very different...and yet also beautiful, beloved children of God. "Do unto others" is more about us stating, believing, praying—"God just as you have been to me, so I will be to others!" Do you FEEL that difference? That shift? "God just as you have been to me, so I will be to others!"

Scripture repeats this over and over:

*Just as God has given us compassion and forgiveness... We are to offer compassion and forgive others. (Eph 4:32)

**Just as God has shown us love... We are to love one another. (1John 4:7-12)*

*Just as God put your needs first... Put the needs of others before your own. (Phil 2:4-7)

**Just as God showed us great mercy... We need to be merciful to others. (Luke 6:36)*

*Just as God generously gave Jesus for us... We need to be generous toward others as well. (2Cor 9:13-15)

God just as you have been to me...so I will **be**...and **do** unto others. This is my prayer. You know, one of my favorite prayers is all about being & doing unto others because of God's love for me: The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. It starts, "Lord make me and instrument of thy peace—and the very first thing named is "Where there is hatred, let me sow love. That's the first step, the most important commandment right? To sow LOVE, to plant, tend, care for love. To scatter the seeds of love to all so it may root and grow and thrive so others can see, and enjoy, and experience, and gather up LOVE.

Friends, the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot happen in our head alone. The Gospel is also about the **heart**. Love God, Love Neighbor, Love Self. Love God, Neighbor, Self. Its an ever flowing, Spirit-filled circle of wholeness & connection...God's heart of love beats continually circling the world, bringing life & hope, planting seeds of possibility within the heart of all believers. And what better time than now, this moment, this week, this Tuesday...to deeply engage hearts of love that freely sow love abundantly.

I started this series challenging us to remember & experiment with how colors can make beautiful new colors. I believe each week we have been challenged to move a bit away from our red or our blue... and focus on a new life-giving color—one that combines a mix of who we ALL are...a color that represents Jesus Christ—**purple**...purple for his royalty as king of kings and Lord of Lords of all! Christ's heart of **purple love** freely, abundantly given to all.\

Today we need to have hearts of **purple love** that embody and release to all our neighbors, to our family, our friends, our classmates, our coworkers, and yes even our enemies—the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hearts of **purple** love... doing unto others what Christ has done for us...is hard...but necessary...in a world filled with pain and hurt, division and judgment, and hate-spewed rhetoric nonstop on every social media outlet, rallies, commercials, and even around the kitchen table.

So today we will receive touchstones to help us claim hearts of **purple** love. Touchstones that remind us of the power & possibility of love. 1st we come to Christ's table where full inclusion is revealed in & through the bread and cup.

Another touchstone at the rail is a **purple** heart-shaped stone, to hold in the palm of your hand, keep in your pocket, or place somewhere to be reminded that we are called to grow our hearts of **purple** love becoming more like Christ in our doing unto others.

Finally, a card will also be at the rail for you to take home. The prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi is all about "doing unto others" with Christ's heart of **purple** love, reminding us to be his instruments of peace—planting & scattering love wherever there is hatred in this world.

Do unto others—with beautifully vibrant, circling hearts of love where a little blue disappears and the little red disappears...all working together to create more & more **hearts of purple love**. May it be so Amen and Amen.