

DEC 29, 2024

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

December 22 sermon— “Hope in Love”

John 3:16-17, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

This is our last week of Advent. Tuesday evening we light the Christ candle as we prepare for the Christmas celebration on Wednesday. Today the candle is love. Our last hope we'll consider this Advent is this, the hope of love.

John 3:16 is a hallmark verse for Christians. God so loved the world. All the world. And Christ came not to condemn the world but to save it.

This is love. The love of God so bold as to walk perfect among the imperfect creation. So deep that there is the willingness of the ultimate, excruciating sacrifice to reconcile that creation. So boundless that even in the throes of death forgiveness is offered.

This is the love that entered the world, that came down in human form at Christmas.

Sometimes when we talk about love people like to throw around the various Greek terms for love as if 1 saying it in Greek makes it matter more and 2 whatever is in the Bible is an exhaustive list of the kinds of love. Nothing is further from the truth.

We have love of family which is different even within itself between love for parents vs. siblings vs. grandparents vs. cousins/aunts/uncles and so forth. Yes it's all family but the distances are different. We have love for our friends, which sometimes feels like love for family and other times not. There is the more general love we have for all humanity, seeing the sacred worth and inherent dignity in each creation of God. Love for a romantic partner which is the deepest of friendships mixed with a spark reserved for that person alone. We love nature in a different way than we love humanity. We love our animals and pets which is a different love than we might have for other friends or family. Love abounds everywhere and trying to cage it into limited categories is futile.

What is important is that love abounds everywhere.

It is central to who we are called to be, created in the image of God. For as 1 John tells us, God IS love.

As much as we are to be loving, love isn't necessarily easy. It takes courage and strength because love is so vulnerable. To love another is to risk rejection and hurt. Even the slightest act of love to the stranger can meet with a sting when it's rejected. Loving another risks dealing with another's imperfections and misgivings. It risks committing to the energy to be love even when love, or maybe even just simple acceptance, isn't what we get in return.

Loving someone no matter how deeply or shallow, no matter how close we are to them or how distant the relationship is a risky, potentially perilous endeavor.

To allow ourselves to be loved is also incredibly vulnerable. It risks trusting someone or something that might not always have our best interests at heart. It risks being taken advantage of. It risks putting our faith in someone or something that may break that faith. It risks opening up to feeling accepted with the chance rejection could be around the corner.

Love is risky. It's still worth it. We'll see why shortly. But to sum it up, without love there's really nothing else of truth and eternal value left. If God is truth as well as love, then what is loving is true. What is not loving is not. That hate is acceptable or desirable is a lie. Permitting callousness as correct is a lie. All of those things that fly in the face of love is embracing a lie that goes against all that God is and created us to be.

Corinthians gives us traits of love. This is important because love isn't tangible. It's something we feel and choose. Make that note. It's not just some warm gooey feeling. It is an attitude to choose even when we don't feel warm and gooey. When we're angry. When we're hurt. Always. But even an attitude can't be experienced by the senses.

What can be experienced is the fruit of the feeling or attitude. This is why Jesus tells us “by their fruits you will know them.” It's the actions that show us the presence or absence of love.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant
5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This is why it says that love never ends. If allowed to be it is an ever uplifting cycle. Even if I act unloving, if the response is loving the hope is that I will, if I have love in my heart, recognize it, and have a change of heart that redirect my path back onto a path of love. It's why Romans tells us to not repay evil for evil but to overcome evil with good. 1 Peter echoes this as well. Evil never casts out evil.

All of this is why love is the hope of the world. Scripture tells us that "love covers a multitude of sins." Love is the origin of understanding and giving of ourselves for the uplifting of another. It is the origin of sacrifice. Love sees humanity as a single unit all making their way through an imperfect world together. Even if we're half a world away. So love takes the whole of God's creation into account in how we live our lives. The fruit of our lives, our words and deeds, bear out just how all in we've given ourselves over to the love of God, revealed in Jesus, and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Each of the last three hopes are founded in this. The hope revealed in time is time extended because the love of God is so great that God would give as many as much time as possible to come to faith. The hope revealed in the Word of God directs us to the God we are to imitate and please, and at the heart of this God is love. The hope revealed in compassion is based fully in love. Love is what generates a true compassion rather than just some imposed expectation to do nice things for people in need.

This week we celebrate the love that came down at Christmas as the hymn says. Let that love inspire us to the same kind of rabid, boundless, unconditional love that we receive from Almighty God. May it humble and give us strength to go into the new year with a renewed resolve to spread the love of Jesus in a way that impacts our communities and world and invites others to join us in the great mission and commission to follow Jesus in the miracle of His birth, the mission of His life, the sacrifice of His death, and the promise of the resurrection that death no longer has a grip on us. Amen

REMINDER:

Pastor Brent is on vacation until Sunday, Jan 5th