How to Live in Love

 Acts 4:32-39 Kimby Young

Philippians 4:4-9 April 21 2024

Colossians 3:12-17

When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, of course we know, the world was changed forever. I started thinking recently how much the individual lives were changed of the friends and followers of Jesus. Maybe, I started thinking about it because of my own personal loss at the death of my sister – and how much my life changed in that moment. For the disciples, imagine not only that personal pain and absence of someone you love, but then the overwhelming joy and shock of the resurrection three days later. Add to that the sudden realization that their daily life changed immediately. They were no longer students following an exciting and loving teacher. Suddenly they were in charge of the mission of Jesus on earth. Everything Jesus had taught - they were now called to teach. Everything Jesus had done to point the way to God was suddenly their task and responsibility. Beyond that, they had to figure out how to live in a dangerous world – how to take care of each other and reach out to share God’s love with others. Admittedly they were not alone. Jesus had taught them well. The Spirit came after 50 days at the celebration of Pentecost. The Spirit filled them with gifts and power and understanding. Even so, the task of sharing Jesus’ mission and ultimately birthing a church had to be a bit overwhelming. Some of the early church scripture gives us a glimpse of what they faced, and offers us some advice about how we are called to live God’s love in the world, how to be the church of Jesus today.

The first reading from Acts 4 is a short reading about common life together in the early church. There are several other passages I could have used. The book of Acts is full of stories about life among the first believers. They took care of each other. They shared freely and generously. I’m not advocating communal living because that’s not who we are today. But I do see that “being of one heart and soul,” sharing personal faith testimony, and taking care of needs - is love that should be lived in our church today. And for the most part is shared here among us. If we hear of a need, you are generous with your meals and your phone calls, your cards and your caring. And that love is not limited to inside these walls or membership rolls. You show your love in practical purposeful ways. You check on each other. You offer your time and your gifts. You are generous as far as you are able. You care.

The phrase “being of one heart and soul” as described in Acts is interesting. I think it expresses more than uniformity. It is not that they were identical. It is not that they pushed conformity. In fact, other passages of scripture are very clear that there was great diversity within the early church – slave, free, male, female, from all different parts of the world, with a variety of gifts to share. No, it’s not that everyone was alike. It’s that everyone shared. Everyone participated. Everyone loved Jesus and wanted to show their love for God. “One heart and soul” reminds me of the body of Christ. One body. Jesus was their guide and motivated their decisions. Jesus inspired their actions. It seems more about the intention to be like Jesus – to imitate Jesus in his love and welcoming spirit, his purpose of bringing people to God, and his action centered care. Notice, it didn’t say they were of one mind (in this passage anyway), which makes me think they did sometimes disagree. They weren’t identical. But they figured out how to work it out, how to work together for the common good, how to communicate and connect, and how to move forward in the mission of Jesus Christ. Of course, they were no more perfect than we are. Other scripture passages record disagreements and challenges. But again, they sought to share the heart and soul of Jesus. They tried to do what they thought Jesus would do. I think today, we try to do the same. To love God. To love others. To move forward in God’s grace.

Just how did they do that? Actually, more to my point today, how can we do that? How can we communicate and connect amid disagreement? How can we show God’s love, care for one another and the world, and move forward to share Jesus’ mission in the world today? How do we make wise decisions and know what God might want us to do? As you know, it is not easy. There is nothing in the Bible about social media or live streaming. We know so much today about far distant parts of the world and the huge variety of problems people face. One size does not fit all. Even in this room. What brings me close to Jesus may feel boring and repetitive to you. What I think I am equipped to share may be a whole different set of gifts than what you are able to offer. How could we share all things in common? So that everyone feels valued and loved, so that everyone contributes and cares. So that we all connect to God and share freely. That is in fact what church is all about. And not just for the people in this room. How can we value and honor people all over the world, and share God’s love in meaningful merciful ways?

I do not have the answers to those questions. I am asking. We are asking and seeking God’s guidance. In the second and third scriptures for today, we are offered a long list of advice.

Rejoice in the Lord. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. Let your requests be made known to God. Think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, and worthy of praise. Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Clothe yourself with love. Bear with one another. Forgive each other. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Let music and Bible study and prayer help you. Be thankful. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

That is really excellent advice. A lifetime worth of fantastic advice to live by. But it is also a tiny bit overwhelming. Rejoice. Be thankful. Forgive. Put on love. Do everything for Jesus. Of course. But how do I deal with the person cutting me off in traffic, or worse, the friend or family member who is hurtful. The neighbor who is disrespectful. The politician who is unjust. The corporation that is destructively selfish. How do we live this kind of grace and goodness recommended in scripture, how do we live this love every single moment of every single day? How do we forgive ourselves and start over when we fail?

The first answer for the early church and for us today – is that we do it together. We love and work together. When I fall you pick me up. When you falter, someone else right here supports you. We listen to each other, and we listen through the Holy Spirit to God’s guidance. We choose to act lovingly. We decide to trust – not only trust God, but also trust one another. Life in community is not always easy. But life is best when lived in community.

As I’ve said, we are pretty good, most of the time, at taking care of one another. But you step outside these doors or look at social media or evening news, and we know that people are not good at caring for one another, caring for strangers, caring for the world. There is so much chaos in the world. That leads to so much distrust in the world. We don’t know who to believe. A million voices are shouting at once in negative life draining screams. We are called to put on love like armor or a new suit. Put on love and wade right into that chaos of the world. Clothe yourself in love so that that is what others see when they see you. Let them see Jesus. Let them see the love of God in everything you do. It’s not easy. It is essential. Put on the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord every single morning. Wear Jesus. Wear love like clothing every time you enter the world. And by God’s grace, you are able to offer that love to the world in the name of Jesus Christ.