

Sermon: "Love, Love, Love"

Scripture: John 15:12-17; 1 Peter 4:8-11

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Have you ever had one of those moments where you opened your mouth to speak and this strange thing happens – you open your mouth to speak and your mother comes out? Or maybe not your mother but your father or grandparent, guardian, spouse, life-long friend or another person in your life with whom you have spent a lot of time and who has been a big influence in your life – their voice seems to come forth when you speak. You know the sort of moment where you know you are speaking but what you have just said sounds exactly like someone else who has had an impact in your life. The other month, I found myself complaining about my electric bill and I realized that I was sounding just like my father – the manner in which I was complaining, my inflection, my tone, my mannerisms, all of it was just like his complaints around electric bills when I was a child. It can be a bit spooky really. And to that end, sometimes these moments can surprise and shock us – we may not always wish to be sounding like these other folks in our lives. However, other times, these moments remind us of the closeness of our loved ones and that the lessons they share and have shared and the wisdom they have offered continues on. Now, these phenomena don't just necessarily have to do with the words we say but even the actions that we take. Haven't you ever had a moment when you think, that what I am doing right now is exactly what this person would have done? I know I have those moments. In this life, we often find ourselves mirroring the people who have had the most impact in our lives and they have instilled in us certain lessons – some of which we may give thanks for, others maybe not so much. But still, we pick up on the things that are shared with us throughout this life and we often find ourselves repeating them and passing them on.

Now, again, I know we may not always like that we sound like certain folks from our lives, but today I want us to think about the one whom scripture hopes we will imitate – whose words will become our words and whose actions will become our very own. In

our second reading this morning from 1 Peter, we are told that moments like this should happen in our lives and we should even strive for them – not necessarily having those words or actions that sound like an influential person in our lives, though they may have revealed God to us too, but we should have more moments where our words are like the very words of God and more moments where our actions of love and care, those ways in which we help to carry the burdens of others, that they too should reflect the strength of God. As we grow in our faith, as we spend more intentional time with God in moments of reflection, study, worship, prayer, as we open ourselves to be aware of the impact that God has had and continues to have on us, we should have those lessons instilled which will inspire more moments like these- moments where we open our mouths to speak and the words that come out sound like they are coming directly from the Divine! The words that we speak should echo with God’s love, reverberate with the same abounding grace, be filled with compassion and a forgiving heart, and sound as if they are spoken by the Christ we follow. Moments where we think to ourselves, that sounds like something God might say! In addition, we should also have those moments where we look at what we are doing and can see God doing just that! Now at times, these moments may surprise and shock us too – after all in our human capacity we may not always be willing and ready to say what God would want us to say or to do what the strength of God empowers us to do. We always have more lessons to learn and there is always more room for God to instill some more knowledge into our lives. Yet we should strive to have more and more moments like this as we serve God, as we follow Jesus, as we love one another.

Throughout this month, we have been spending some intentional time looking at the 3 Great Loves identified by the United Church of Christ in this special story telling campaign – love of neighbor, love of children, and love of creation, all of which show our love for God! Today, we remember them all as we stress one more time the importance of love. As Jesus calls us to do in the Gospel of John, we are to love one another – something that seems so simple and yet something that we work at all

throughout this life – something that I believe God is constantly trying to instill within us. Jesus too reminds us in our reading from John today that when we love, that this is often a place of sacrifice as well. He says, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus was of course at this time foreshadowing his death and that very literal giving of one’s life. However, this sort of self-giving love is not one that only means we should be willing to die for the love of another, but that we should be willing to use this life, to lay down the days, the minutes, the hours, the time that we are afforded – we should be willing to use our life for the love of another. I truly believe that the time we have on this earth is the most precious gift we can give. For time which really represents this earthly life, this time is not something that we can ever get back. But when we use our life, when we use the time that has been given to us for love, we help to create something that is timeless, and in those moments, we should see and hear God through our words and actions of compassion.

In just a moment, we will be honoring our Summerfest recipients as we will too be especially mindful of the ways in which the leaders, staff, and volunteers of these organizations give of their lives and give of themselves, to love our neighbors, our children, and the gift of creation. We will remember that they help to share the love of God out into the world, as they speak God’s words of love and light through their care for others. And for this, we give thanks.

Beloved People of God, a simple message is before us today. We may not always wish to sound like our parents or another elder in our lives, but may we always strive to sound more like God, in how we live and how we love. So be it and may it be so. Amen.