

A Message delivered on Sunday, March 8th., 2020 at the John Wesley United Methodist Church, Falmouth, MA.

“THE LOVE FOR GOD AND THE LOVE FOR OTHERS”

- Matthew 22:34-46

After been found guilty of a serious criminal offense, a defended stood before the judge for sentencing. The judge spoke, and said: “You have been found guilty of 29 counts. Hereby, I am sentencing you to 5 years on each count, totaling a 95 years of prison time. “But, your honor,” responded the defendant, tearful. “I am already 75 years old, and I’ll never be able to serve that much time in prison, Sir.” The facial expression on the judge softened, as he said to the man, “I know, I know, the sentence is rather severe, but you don’t really have to serve the whole time...just do as much as you can!”

You heard Jesus say in Matthew’s Gospel that Betty read to us:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength...(and) you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37, 38). Not that you love your neighbor” as much as you can” but “with all the might you have and with all what you are. What Jesus means was, “don’t take any short- cuts”. You cannot do good unto others, by taking a short cut to do them.

You see, Jesus is calling us from our inertia of “nothingness” to His kingdom of radical love, expecting the maximum of us - not just for a day, or a month, or an year, not even when nearing your 85th. years like I do. We are called to do the maximum. Please, notice that Jesus was saying this in answer to a question from one of the Pharisees who was there. Unlike the Saducees, the Pharasees were sticklers regarding the Jewish Laws, commonly called the “Torah”.

You must know that the words Jesus as having said in Matthew’s Gospel, Ch. 22, and vv. 37, 38 were direct quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy Ch. 6, v. 5., which is the Law

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”. (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Jesus knew that there’s nothing that love cannot conquer; that, there is no disease that’s so unbearable that love will not heal, no door that love will not open, that there’s no gulf that’s so large that love will not bridge, that there’s no wall that love will not bring down, and no sin that’s so large love will not redeem. It was Emma Fox who said: “If only you could love enough, you would be the happiest person, and the most powerful person on earth. No matter how deep-seated your troubles may be, how hopeless an outlook you may have in life, (or) how muddled and tangled life may have it” (Emma Fox), if there’s true love, you will come out successfully.

Even among some of those whom we know so closely, we find so much enmity, hatred, and malice, and we don’t seem to feel the Love of God flowing through, either from them to us or from us to them. It seems that the conduit between them and us and from us to them is blocked forever. Often, we are

seen as building dams, preventing the flow of God's love and goodwill either to them or to us from them. But then, I hasten to say, there are those others who are just the opposite; whose lives continue to be a conduit of the Love of God flowing through. You believe that don't you? On Sunday morning, we can all be in our best behavior, and show others how much we love God. But then Jesus intervenes saying to us, "Not enough, my child. Not enough"! Because, according to Jesus, the depth of our love for God is only measured by the depth of our love for one another. Do we get it?? Here's something I came across a while ago, and found it appropriate in this context. It's a little long, and still I want to share it with you. Now, listen carefully:

The twilight was setting in, and a quiet drizzle of rain kept coming down, and a tired man was driving home after work. Through the dim light of the evening, he could see someone standing by the road-side; a woman and too an old lady, stranded and desperately in need of help. So the tired man pulled over in his 1985 Pontiac in front of the old lady's Mercedes Benz. Leaving his car running, the man approached the driver's side, and saw the old lady at the wheel. For her part, while feeling a sense of relief because help was on its way, she had some apprehension; the man looked hungry, wet and rather unkept. The woman began to ask herself: "Would he hurt me, rob me and leave me stranded", she asked herself. Just then, the man got close to the driver's side, and in a soft voice said: "Ma'am, I am here to help you. By the way, my name is Bryan. Why don't you stay inside your car", said Bryan, to the old lady, "where it's dry and warm, and let me see what I could do here. I can see it, it's only a flat tire and I can easily fix it for you", he said. For Bryan it was a simple job. He was quite knowledgeable about these things. While the two exchanged pleasantries, Bryan crawled under the car to look for a place to jack-up the car. Getting his hands and clothes soiled because the ground was wet and muddy, but Bryan managed to change the tire. And, as he tightened the lug nuts, she said to him, "I am on my way from St. Louis, and was just passing through here when it all happened", she said. Finally, when Bryan finished the job, the old lady said to him, "Mr. I can't thank you enough for this great help", and she was trying to hand him something for his help, and while refusing the offer, he said to her: "Mam, I don't even remember the many times when others have helped me out in similar circumstances. I only knew of one way to return their love and favor; - to help others in similar circumstances as this. Therefore, Mam", said Bryan, "if you really want to pay me back for what I did, help someone else who may need help, and then think of me".

Bryan waited until the old woman started her car and drove off into the twilight. A few miles down the road, the lady saw a small cafe. Feeling a bit hungry, she stopped there to get something to eat and some coffee to warm herself up before making her last leg of the journey. As the waitress was placing the order menu in front of old woman, she noticed that the old lady's hair was completely wet, so she ran back to get the lady a towel to wipe her wet hair. In spite of the fact that the waitress had been on her feet all day, she was very kind to her. Just then, the old lady noticed that the waitress was pregnant, when she also learned that she was 8 months pregnant. The old woman wondered, how could someone who has so little and was so tired, be so giving, especially to a stranger. Just then she remembered Bryan. When it was time for her to pay her bill, she pulled out a 100 dollar and gave it to the waitress. When the waitress went in to get the change, the old woman slowly slipped out of the cafe, and when the waitress returned, she was left with 90 dollars in her hand. and with something written on the napkin on the table. And, the note read:

“You don’t owe me anything back. I have been there before. Somebody once helped me too. And, if you really want to pay me back, here’s what you should do: let not this chain of love end with you”.

And as waitress read the note, she could only bend her head down and cry. And, as she began to clear the table, she saw under the plate four \$100.00 dollar bills. She couldn’t stop crying, because the money came at a crucial time in her life and that of her husband’s.

That night, as the waitress drove home, she could only think of the old lady and her ‘huge heart of kindness’: “How could she have known my husband and I are facing major financial problems, especially with a new baby due next month.” The waitress knew how worried her husband too was about their financial problem. By this time she arrived at home; her husband was already in bed. And, as she slowly crept under the blanket, while cuddling herself close to him, she kissed him softly on his cheek, and whispered in his ear, “Bryan, I love you. It’s all going to be alright”.

Friends, remember, once upon a time Jesus said this: (in Matthew’s Gospel, Ch. 7, v/12) “Do unto others as you would have others do to you; for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Mt. 7:12). Amen.

Yet, let it not be for the sake of the Law, but for the sake of your love for God, and your love for one another. Amen.