

ONE LOVE

1 John 3:11-18

Newbegun United Methodist Church

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Today I just want to have us remember once again about the defining characteristic of Christianity and the defining characteristic of Christians everywhere. What is that definitive characteristic? Knowledge? A political agenda? A culturally relevant social media presence? No, the defining characteristic for Christianity, for this church, and for each one of us, is love. You know, they will know we are Christians by our – what? Love. Of course, we know the greatest commandments – Love God with all your heart and all your soul, and your entire mind. And love your neighbor as yourself. Later on at the Last Supper Jesus left this for his disciples to ponder – “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35)

Don't let anyone fool you into thinking it is anything but love. We are not known as Christians by the way we vote. Or if you have the desired opinions. Or if you belong to the right church or organization. Or if you set people straight on twitter. Or by your bumper stickers or your boycotts. There are many ways in which people will judge whether you are a Christian or not, but it really comes down to this: “Beloved, let us love on another, for love is of God and everyone that loves is born of God and knows God. People who do not love do not know God, for God is love.” (! John4:7-8) So allow me today to lift up the quality of love and ask ourselves what does it really take to love in the sacrificial way that God loves us?

First of all, loving in the sacrificial way that God loves us is non-negotiable. “Love one another” is not just a suggestion, not just a guideline, not just a random idea that Jesus has submitted for your approval. Instead it is a plainly-stated, cut-and-dried, not-two-ways-about-it direct charge – “This is what you are to do: love one another.” John wrote in verse 11, “This is the message you have heard from the beginning: we should love one another.” Jesus said in John 13 – “A new commandment I give to you. Love one another, as I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

One New Year’s Eve I was watching a local news channel and the newswoman was out on the highways reporting on the police patrols they had around the city for drunk driving. Thinking she would have some discussion with the officer she asked him, “How fast must drivers be going over the speed limit for you to stop them? You know, do you let them have 5 miles, 8 miles, 10 miles over before you stop them?” He said “One mile. One mile over the speed limit and they are breaking the law.” Pushing the envelope she asked, “But we always hear that you allow some wiggle-room.” He said, “I can arrest you for going 1 mile over the speed limit.” This back-and-forth went on for several minutes on live TV until she finally gave up and said, “So there you are folks. Stay within the law.” That policeman was right and he wouldn’t budge. And that is how Jesus is on his command. “Love one another” means “Love one another” and there is no wiggle-room. It is non-negotiable. The “one another” includes people that are different than us, who are hurting, afraid, or lost. It includes our enemies along with our friends It includes all nations, races, cultures, and tribes. In fact, I can’t find a single person it does not include. The hardest thing to do is the only thing Christians can do – Love one another. The sacrificial love of Jesus is non-negotiable.

Another thing about the sacrificial love of Jesus that is different than others is that loving one another takes action. Here is what John wrote, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" He goes on to say, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." Sometimes we think that if we feel bad enough for someone's problem that is good enough. We think we have done our part. We'll say, "Gee, brother, I don't like to see what you are going through. I want you to know you are in my prayers and thoughts. Now it is true that our prayers, interceding for their behalf is vitally important. But here is what I am saying, when people you know are going through a difficult time, of course we need to pray that God will meet their needs. And then we need to be willing to do what we can to be the answer to that prayer.

For example, if you know someone who needs a job, pray that God will meet that need and maybe you could make a phone call or two to see who can help them out. If you know someone is going through a health crisis, you will certainly pray for them and maybe you could visit them or bring them some books or drive them to the doctor's office. If you know someone whose life is spinning out of control, or someone who has lost their way, or someone struggling with despair, you surely want to pray for them, and maybe offer to baby sit or mow the yard or take them out to dinner or any number of things. You see, love is not just verbal, it is expressed through the things we do. It is action. And the greatest of loving actions is the kind of sacrificial love Jesus did for us on the cross.

Finally, I refer to a subject that has been mentioned all through the message and that is that the love that Christ calls us to requires that we make a sacrifice. John wrote

in this Gospel, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” On October 20, 2009 a suicide bomber entered the women’s campus of Islamabad’s International Islamic University. He shot the guard on duty and made the approach toward the cafeteria, which was packed with hundreds of female students. The janitor on duty that day was a young man named Pervaiz Masih. It was his first week on the job. His salary was less than \$60 a month. Pervaiz intercepted the bomber in the doorway and prevented him from going further. The terrorist then detonated his device, killing the janitor and three others. Had he made it into the cafeteria, those deaths would have been much greater.

The twist on this story is that Pervaiz was a Christian. In Pakistan, believers are in the minority, and traditionally are among the poorest communities. But this man came to be considered a hero. He gave his life to save the lives of hundreds of female students. As one professor said, “He rose above the barriers of caste, creed, and sectarian terrorism. Despite being a Christian, he sacrificed his life to save the Muslim girls.” What a great story. The fact is none of us will ever be called upon to make such a sacrifice. But there are other ways: your time, your riches, your attention, maybe a day off of work, or some level of comfort, - all for the love of another. Loving one another calls for a sacrifice of some sort.

All throughout the New Testament we are told to love one another. By our love they will know we are disciples of Christ Jesus. That love is Non-negotiable; full of action; and follows the example of the sacrificial love of God. Amen.