

“Love - The Radical Center”
Lent 4: Radical Renovation
1 John 4:7-21 ; Mark 12:28-34
March 30, 2014

What do you think of when you hear love? During this time of semi-quarantine and social distancing where groups of any size are being discouraged from meeting face-to-face, expressions of love are looking a little different:

- The young woman who stands outside the window of her grandfather’s nursing home window, showing her new engagement ring, and then pressing her hand to his from either side of the glass
- Birthday or other special occasion greetings that are done via Skype or FaceTime
- Restaurants that are handing out free lunches – no questions asked
- The extra efforts that are being made to keep people connected rather than isolated

Our culture seems to talk about love as a feeling between one person or a group of people and another. Love is described as an emotion of great intensity.

But is love more than that?

Is true love more than an emotion or a feeling?

During this season of Lent we’ve been talking about the internal radical renovation that God wants to accomplish in us. We’ve looked at:

- Turning toward the ways of God
- Serving as the greatest act a disciple can do
- Surrendering call that we are to God

But at the center of all of this – at the center of the renovation is LOVE:

- Love is both the **source** of the renovation
- And the **evidence** of the renovation

The source of our renovation is love. The First Letter of John, chapter four tells us that love is born of God; it reminds us that, “We love, because God first loved us.”

The Bible is filled with reminders that God’s love isn’t about feeling, but actions.

Think back to the Hebrew stories of God:

- ✓ Rainbow after the flood
- ✓ Saving the people from slavery in Egypt
- ✓ Manna and quail in the middle of the wilderness
- ✓ Bringing the people home after exile

God doesn’t just speak a word of love - though God certainly does that - God acts out God’s love for God’s people. Ultimately we learn that the greatest act of love is the cross. Our ability to love is rooted in God’s act of love by the way God defined it through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We would not know what love truly is without God’s act of love in Jesus. Our ability to love has its source in God. *“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God.”*

The source of our radical renovation is love.

The evidence of our radical renovation is also love.

In Mark’s gospel a scribe asks Jesus what the greatest commandment is. The two that Jesus quote are not new to him. They are a part of the long history of the Hebrew people, a piece that was known as the *Shema*: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

What is unique is the way Jesus bound them together. The first is to love God. In Matthew’s telling of this story (Matthew 22:34-40), Jesus says, “And the second is like it” – to love others.

In Mark’s telling, these are the two most important commandments. In Matthew’s telling Jesus says that “all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments”

Jesus is really summing up the faith life here!

The greatest commandment is to act on our love for God by acting out our love for others. When we act on our love for God by acting out our love for others,

- ✓ There is evidence that we let God into the house of our souls
- ✓ There is evidence that we are content to let God do more than a little fix up work
- ✓ there is the evidence that God is working that radical renovation in us

George was a young man who enlisted in the military during WWII. He was injured twice, then taken prisoner in Germany. He was forced to march from one POW camp to another receiving only daily rations of a small piece of bread and water soup.

One day on their march, a German woman approached George. Without speaking a word she thrust a warm loaf of bread into George's hand. That's what radical renovation looks like! That's what love in action looks like! *"Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."*

Evidence of God's radical renovation in our lives is demonstrated in our ability to love and measured by God's act of love in Jesus Christ.

Love shaped by the cross is love in action.

Love is not a look, a feeling, or an emotion; love is an action. And even in these challenging times of semi-quarantine and social distancing, love in action is possible.

- Rebecca Mehra shared her story on Twitter. She had gone to the grocery store to pick up a few things and on her way into the store she heard a voice calling out. Rebecca walked to the truck where she heard the voice and the woman in the passenger seat rolled down her window. She explained that she and her husband were both in their 80's and afraid of getting sick. She said that they don't have family around to help them out. Through the crack in the window she handed me a \$100 bill and a grocery

list, and asked if I would be willing to buy her groceries. I bought the groceries and placed them in her trunk, and gave her back the change. She told me she had been sitting in the car for nearly 45 min before I had arrived, waiting to ask the right person for help.

- The Nextdoor app, which connects people with others in their neighborhoods, is full of people offering to help higher-risk individuals with whatever they need as they self isolate. The same sort of program is offered here at Holy Trinity through our Holy Helpers program. Whether it's picking up food, groceries, or medicine, there's a lot of love to be found!
- When the NBA season was suspended, a number of basketball players and team owners have stepped up to make sure that the people who work to make the games great for teams and fans are being taken care of during the break. For example, Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo has pledged \$100,000 for the Fiserv Forum staff. "It's bigger than basketball!" he said in a tweet when he announced his plan to help workers whose incomes have been disrupted by the coronavirus outbreak. New Orleans Pelicans player Zion Williamson said on Instagram that he would pay the salaries of Smoothie King Center employees for the next 30 days. "These are the folks who make our games possible," he wrote. Blake Griffin, from the Detroit Pistons, said on Twitter that he'll be donating \$100,000 to the Little Caesars Arena staff. Kevin Love also pledged \$100,000 to help the Cleveland Cavaliers arena staff, and the Golden State Warriors ownership, players, and coaches have committed \$1 million to a disaster relief fund established by the Warriors Community Foundation.
- Another woman shared on Twitter that her elderly neighbor who was social distancing with the goal of staying healthy was treated to some music by her young neighbors. The two young cellists set up shop on her porch and played their instruments to the woman inside.

Every act of love undermines the power of evil, violence, hatred and sin. That's the work Christ came to do! Perhaps that is why these two commandments rise to the surface as most important. Because when we love God in our actions of love toward others the work of Christ is happening.

In the movie Dead Man Walking Sister Helen (played by Susan Sarandon) has been building a relationship with a man on death row and with his victim's family.

The relationship is a difficult one, especially as she takes in the heinousness of his crime and begins to get to know the victim's family.

Still, at one point in the movie, Sister Helen says to the man condemned to death: *I want the last face you see in this world to be the face of love, so you look at me when they do this thing. I'll be your face of love."*

The power of acted out love has the capacity to undermine evil, violence, hatred and sin.

When Jesus hung on the cross he offered forgiveness for a criminal. He asked God's forgiveness for those who were part of the machine of death that would take his life. He demonstrated on both this and the other side of life the power of a love acted out. Jesus' act of love on the cross undermined evil, violence, hatred and sin for all times.

Look at his face, and you'll see the face of love. Thanks be to God!

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God;
everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

AMEN!