

## **11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

Romans 12:9-21

“Let love be genuine; oppose what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor...”

Back in the summer of 2016, I attended the Presbyterian Youth Triennium at Purdue. As Roman Leto and Megan Meier know from our shared experience last summer, it is a wonderful week as over 5,000 youth and adults gather for fun, fellowship and shared faith in small group settings for bible study and discussion, followed later in the day with everyone gathered for worship. The music and messages are always inspiring and up-lifting.

So it was with great interest and hope, that I joined a diverse group of Presbyterians from around the country who had gathered in the lounge area of Cary Quad to listen to a very important speech by a national leader. In his speech, he said spoke about shared values and love of “our” people, going on to say: **“Anyone who endorses violence, hatred or oppression is not welcome in our country and never ever will be.”**

What a wonderful statement, one that, as a person of faith, I could agree with, and if you listen to the words of the Apostle Paul writing to the early followers of Christ who lived in Roman, so might Paul: **“Let love be genuine, oppose what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection...”**

So it was interesting to hear this same person say in other speeches: “Anyone who endorses violence, hatred or oppression is not welcome in our country and never ever will be” say in other speeches: “Knock the crap out of him, would you” and “I would like to punch him in the face” and “I’ll beat the crap out of you” and “Part of the problem is nobody wants to hurt each other anymore” and “I can shoot someone on Fifth Ave and nobody can anything about it.”

**“Let love be genuine, oppose what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection...”**

Reflecting further on Paul’s words, listen to these words in a corporate mission statement whose values were reflected in their motto: “Respect, Integrity, Communication, Excellence”: **“We treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves.... We do not tolerate abusive or disrespectful treatment. Ruthlessness, callousness and arrogance don’t belong here.”**

This was the mission statement of the former energy company Enron.

Words are just empty words unless we live them out in our lives, letting them permeate into our very hearts, minds, and souls, impacting our cultural, community and churches.

Maybe that is why Paul wrote to those early followers of Jesus reminding them to "Let love be genuine, oppose what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection..."

To be genuine, by definition, means to be "authentic, real, true, sincere, open, on the level, and honest-to-God"

Perhaps "honest-to-God" is really what Paul was getting at when he wrote these words. As later, in 1 John 4:20-21, followers of Christ are reminded about the "honest-to-God" love we are to have with these words: **"Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."**

Put another way, these words of scripture might sound like this: **"Don't speak to me about your religion; first show it to me in how you treat other people. Don't tell me how much you love your God; show me in how much you love all her children. Don't preach to me your passion for your faith; teach me through your compassion for your neighbors. In the end, I'm not as interested in what you have to tell or sell as in how you choose to live and give."** (Cory Booker)

Letting our "honest-to-God" love be authentic is not easy, especially when we hear elected officials from the highest office saying things about hatred and fear of others, encouraging violence while seeing an increase of violence, gun violence, hate crimes, and evil in our society and world.

In his book, "Beartown" which I highly recommend to you, author Fredrik Backman writes:

**"Hate can be a deeply stimulating emotion. The world becomes easier to understand and much less terrifying if you divide everything and everyone into friends and enemies, we and they, good and evil. The easiest way to unite a group isn't through love, because love is hard, It makes demands. Hate is simple. So the first thing that happens in a conflict is that we choose a side, because that's easier than trying to hold two thoughts in our heads at the same time. The second thing that happens is that we seek out facts that confirm what we want to believe - comforting facts, ones that permit life to go on as normal. The third is that we dehumanize our enemy."**

Living out Jesus new commandment to love one another as he loved is not an easy thing for us to do. I think Backman is correct, hate and fear of others can be much easier, because love makes demands on all of us.

Nelson Mandela: **"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."**

So here we are, the followers of Jesus, gathered together at the table of Christ in a parking lot and virtually on social media. Here at this table, in the sharing of bread and cup, in their many forms, we experience the genuine love of the One who showed us how to live our lives, openly and honestly.

Here at this table, in the breaking of bread and sharing of cup, we stand together in opposing the messages of hatred, violence, and evil, through our non-violent acts of compassion, mercy, kindness, empathy, and generosity, in sharing of our selves and resources in Christ's name with all the world.

Friends, as followers of Christ, may our "honest-to-God" love be genuine, so that we can together in our thoughts, words, and deeds overcome hatred and evil by holding fast to what is good. Amen.