

Worship for February 20, 2022

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship Psalm 100

Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness.

Come into God's presence with singing!

**For the Lord is a gracious God,
whose mercy is everlasting;
and whose faithfulness endures to all generations.**

*Hymn 33 Praise the Lord! God's Glories Show

Prayer

**Almighty God,
you have taught us that all our deeds without love are worth nothing.
Send your Holy Spirit to pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,
the very bond of peace and of all goodness;
forgive us where we have failed to show your love and bear one another's sorrow, and turn
us to your way,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ,
you are forgiven.

May the God of mercy,
who forgives all your sins,
strengthen you in all goodness,
and by the power of the Holy Spirit
keep you in eternal life. Amen.

Moments With Our Young Disciples

Scripture Reading 6:27-38

Morning Message

Our old and trusty friend, William Barclay, says there is no commandment or speech of Jesus that has caused so much discussion and debate as his commandment to love our enemies.

I can certainly relate to that. Loving those who hate me, hurt me, or worse, mistreat my loved ones, will not inspire any tender affection here. How about you?

Barclay suggests we unpack this speech before we react to or try to follow it.

So, let's go to Greek class for a few moments. In Greek, as you likely know, there are multiple words for "love."

Eros, is passionate love, the intimate love of a man or a woman for another.

Philia, is the love for our nearest and dearest, our family, children, our closest friends. Sometimes we call it "brotherly love."

And *agape*, which is maybe the most complicated type of love to describe. It is the active feeling of benevolence toward the other person. It means that no matter what that person does to us we will never allow ourselves to desire anything but that person's highest good; and we will deliberately go out of our way to show kindness and fairness to him or her.

This is a tall order and does not come naturally. Ask yourself if it's possible to love your mean neighbor like you love your mother or your grandchildren. It seems nigh unto impossible for me, maybe even wrong. I would argue that there are indeed some people we just shouldn't engage because to do so would cause harm.

The love we bear for our nearest and dearest is something we cannot help. Our language describes the mystery of this by saying things like, "we fall in love." It is attributed to a force beyond ourselves. We celebrated Valentine's Day this past week. At what moment did you "fall in love" with that special person in your life? Did you resist that feeling? Could you?

But this love Jesus is calling for, a love for our enemies, is not so much a matter of the *heart* as it is a matter of the *will*. It is something which, only by the grace and help of God, we intentionally do.

Barclay points us to some important characteristics of what he calls the Christian ethic, which is the foundation for the *agape* form of love:

First, the Christian ethic is positive. It does not exist by *not* doing things, but by doing things intentionally. Jesus gave us the Golden Rule, to *do* unto others as we would have them *do* unto us.

We can find that same rule in other languages and cultures, but it is often set out in a negative statement. For instance, Hillel, one of the most revered Jewish Rabbis, was once asked to teach a man the law while he stood on one leg.

Hillel answered like this, so goes the legend, “What is hateful to thee, do not to another. That is the whole law and all else is explanation.”

Philo, the Jewish teacher of Alexandria, explained it this way: “What you hate to suffer, do not do to anyone else.”

Isocrates, the great Greek orator, said, “What things make you angry when you suffer them at the hands of others, do not you do to other people.”

You can see what we mean then about this ethic not to just avoid wrong-doing, but to intentionally do what is good. It is not just to stay out of trouble, but to invest some energy into doing something good even when you know it won't be reciprocated or appreciated.

Who does that? Who, seriously, is capable of living with that kind of dissonance? Public servants, for sure. Teachers do this every day. Treating each and every student equally, seeking to educate and enrich young lives while working through the many challenges they are presented.

Who watches “Blue Bloods?” It's one of my favorite shows, though I was late to the party. I thought, based on the name, that it was about a family of aristocrats, like “Dynasty.” But, I had missed the word play. In this case, “Blue Bloods” is about the life and times of the Reagan family of New York City, who are bound together not just by their Irish Catholic faith and ancestry, but by their common calling to serve the citizens of New York in various aspects of law enforcement.

New York City is sometimes called the capital of the world. And indeed, it seems so. Soaring to the top of the Empire State Building, we dream of humankind's greatest achievements. Peering into the tunnels that lie beneath the city, we can witness the worst of human depravity. It is a city full of life and creativity and opportunity, filled with color and sound and masses of people. It is a city of great need, her citizens coping with poverty and homelessness and crime. It is a city of immigrants. It is a city of many faiths. It is city that has survived the greatest of tragedies. It is a city in love with itself. And at war with itself. Every day.

And in this bustling and beautiful metropolis the Reagan family lives and moves and has its being. It includes the patriarch, Henry, the retired Police Commissioner, his son, Frank, the current PC and patriarch- in- training. Two sons and a daughter- in- law serve as police officers. A third died in the line of duty. The only daughter is a lawyer in the District Attorney's office. At least one grandson has joined the family business. And it's a messy business, often unfair to the ones in blue, often cruel to their loved ones. What are these people made of?

We get a clue in the scenes set around the family dinner table, an event which happens every Sunday as regularly as Mass. It is there we hear of the triumphs and tragedies of keeping the good people of New York safe and fully functioning, even at risk to their own safety and well-being. It gets complicated, yet they seem to thrive in it and love it all the more.

The Reagans don't shrink from debate. They can be loud and lively, sometimes even angry and obnoxious. Stabbing a pork chop, one asks, "Which rules are non-negotiable? Whose interest do we serve?" And with that question, we are drawn into the most compelling of questions: Which has the higher value: civic law or God's law? Justice or mercy? They can be in conflict.

Scripture tells us that God sends the rain to fall on the just and the unjust alike. God breathes life into all of us, those who are faithful and those who give not a care toward God, the saint and the sinner, the one who grieves God's heart and the one who brings him joy. God always pursues us. His love never ends.

So that's the standard Jesus points us toward. None of us measures up to it this side of heaven. That last curious verse gives us a glimpse of what is to come, a future hope, a blessing so rich a full we cannot yet imagine it.

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

We lift up that hope each time we gather around the table, the big one set with china and crystal and the one set simply with bread and wine. All of us God's grateful, un-finished, imperfect kids, asking God to "Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty. Through Christ our Lord. May it be so for all of us. Amen.

*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed p. 35

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

*Hymn 606 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

**Blessed are you, O God of all creation,
through your goodness we have these gifts to share.
Accept and use our offerings for your glory
and for the service of your kingdom. Amen.**

*Hymn 693 Though I May Speak

*Blessing

Go now, and give your life to the Lord.

Trust in God and do good.

Love and bless everyone, even your enemies.

Do not judge others, but be merciful and generous to all.

Treat others as you would have them treat you.

And may God be quick to act on your behalf,

may Christ Jesus raise you to new and everlasting life;

and may the Holy Spirit go before you to prepare a place for you. Amen.

*Postlude