

## Love Leads to Love

Scripture: 1 John 4:7 – 21 and Matthew 26:26 – 29

2/26/23

Today is the first Sunday of Lent and it is also Week of Compassion Sunday. During our 2023 Lenten season, we will be exploring the essence of Jesus' message – LOVE!

Let's start with a story: At church one morning, a person in a pew closest to the exit door, was wrestling within himself with pent up frustrations, anger, resentment, unforgiveness, and fear. These feels have built up in him for some time now! Throughout his life he has been struggling with these emotions. He always seemed to keep people at a safe distance. As soon as the service ended. As soon as the preacher stopped talking, people stopped singing, and the closing hymn started up, he would rush to pick up his child in the nursery.

When he got to the nursery this time, his oldest son said – 'Can I take my little brother to the Fellowship Hall to get a donut?' Dad said – 'Yes, I will meet you at the car.' The last thing Dad wanted to do was to talk to people!

This cycle of avoidance continued for months! But each Sunday the man would open a Bible and read the scripture text for the day. He began to listen to the preacher more intently and his sermons began to make sense. Eventually the man asked God to help him accept Jesus' love personally. Over time, the man began to hang around after worship service a little longer. He began to join his two boys in the Fellowship Hall for 'goodies'. His knowledge of God and his confidence in Jesus' intimate love for him grew! Now, the man is an Elder in the church and no one can contain his love for God and his people.

The message of love leads to show love. Love leads to love!

The Apostle John describes this type of heart and mind transformation as a response to the ultimate display of God's love for us. Jesus took the punishment we deserve because of our sins and Jesus gave his life for ours through his death on the cross.

By accepting the depth of God's sacrificial love, we are changed! It changes us and gives us the ability to receive love and extend love towards others in the church and beyond.

Though we may struggle with the feelings of being unlovable, God can lead us to accept and share his love.

How have you struggled with the feelings of being 'unlovable'? Have you had stages in your life when you felt 'unlovable'? Are you in that stage now? When have you struggled with receiving God's love for you? And how can you help others to love better and have a healthy life?

For us as a church - How have we struggled with our feelings of being 'unlovable'? Have we had stages in our lives together when we feel 'unlovable'? Are we in that stage now? When have we struggled with receiving God's love for us? And how can we help others to love better and have a healthy life?

Remember when we accept the depth of God's sacrificial love through Jesus Christ, it changes us and give us the ability to receive love and extend love toward others.

The film 'Places in the Heart' tells the story of Edna Spalding, a mother of two and the husband of Royce who is accidentally killed by a boy named Wiley. It is set in Texas in the 1930's. The final scene in the movie takes place in a church during communion time.

In the front row of the church is Edna's sister who is getting a divorce from her husband. Edna is sitting next to her sister's husband and she is lovingly holding his hand. In the next scene we see Moses, an African American man who helps Edna with her farm. In the segregated era in the USA, this is surprising to see. After Edna takes communion, we see something else shocking – Edna passes the bread and wine to her husband who is alive again and he passes communion to Wiley, the man who accidentally killed him.

Some viewers have burst into tears at that final scene. I think they burst into tears because it portrays the reconciliation we all hunger for.

Just imagine if Rosemary Hendrix or my friends who is suffering from cancer, Chick Fisher and Jesse Lynch, or anyone you can think of were here with us during this time upcoming of communion. Would it not make you cry?

As Jesus explained, the communion bread is an emblem of Jesus' body and the juice is an emblem of Jesus' blood. His bread was broken and his blood was shed to reconcile us to God. And as that reconciliation is passed on to others, marriages are mended, racial divisions are erased, and victims and killers become friends. Oh, one day, Jesus will even reunite the living with the dead.

Each of us need reconciliation with God and others. Every time we take communion, we tell ourselves and the world that such reconciliation is available because of what Jesus has done.

With whom do you need to reconcile with? Come to this table, the table of reconciliation!

Let us pray:

Loving God, thank you for working our hearts and minds as you lead us to love you and others selflessly as you have love us. Help us to be reconciling with you and others. AMEN.