

Sermon for Sunday, October 29, 2023

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Confirmation Sunday and Reformation Sunday

“The Practice of Love”

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Decorah, Iowa

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

A lawyer asks Jesus a question to test him. We don't have tests in Confirmation classes here at Good Shepherd, but if we did, all of the students and the whole congregation could pass the test Jesus is given. What is the greatest commandment? What does God care about most? **Love.** Love God. Love others. We could all get an A+ on that test if it was just about giving an answer.

Living that answer is a whole other thing. Love takes work. It takes practice and commitment in much the same way that trumpet, basketball, and the musical do. That's not how we usually understand love in our culture. We say we fall in love, that love is blind, it happens at first sight, it breaks our hearts. We describe love as a feeling that just spontaneously arises, or not, as if we have no power or agency about love.

But Jesus doesn't say, "I hope love happens to you. I hope that you can conjure up some warm, fuzzy feelings about God, that you're uplifted every time you see that person who repulses you, that you feel glad in the presence of your enemy." Jesus doesn't say you must feel a certain way. Instead, he commands us to live out love towards God and others, to make a conscious choice to act in loving ways regardless of how we feel, regardless of how others act.

The first three of the ten commandments tell us how to love God: Trust God rather than things; honor God's name; worship God. The rest of the commandments tell us how to love others: Honor elders; protect life; respect your own and other's relational commitments; guard what belongs to others; speak the truth; let go of wanting what others have. These commandments are given so that all may know the life God wants us to have.

When we choose to act with love, we thrive and others thrive. Our Psalm today describes it beautifully. We are like trees planted by streams of living water - we're grounded, we grow, we offer beautiful things that help to heal and feed the world. Still, so often we don't make the choice to love. We don't protect the lives of others, pain grows, our souls are injured, and the seeds of conflict are watered. We covet what others have, robbing them and ourselves of well-being and peace. We speak in deceitful, mean-spirited ways that diminish ourselves and our common life.

We need help. So, thankfully Jesus doesn't just command us to love and say good luck with that. Jesus goes all in on love - loving with his whole being, his whole life to the very end. Nothing, not even death, can stop Jesus from loving you, forgiving you, raising you up to new life each day to love again. Jesus helps you to experience God's love so that you can love. Our Confirmands bear witness to this in their faith statements.

One writes, "God loves all of us and I believe God will forgive me for my mistakes. In the Bible, there are all these stories about people that have done great things with God's love and bad things and God still loves them."

Another says, "God is a safe place for me to find peace within myself ... God tells me I am strong when I feel weak. When I feel like I don't belong, God tells me I'm his."

The Confirmands also describe how worship and this congregation help them to experience God's love. One says, "Church has become important to me for a variety of reasons: from community, to music, to the strong connection to God that I feel when present."

Another writes, "Good Shepherd makes me feel loved and helps me find my identity."

These young people also describe how they use their whole selves, heart, mind, and soul, to love God and others. One wrote and is quoted here - "Sharing my gifts of music that God gave me with the people of the church" and "doing God's work with helping people less fortunate."

Another says, "When I volunteered for House of Hope with my church youth group, I felt connected with God, because I could already see how God had created opportunities for the people at House of Hope."

All three confirmands bear witness to the importance of using our minds to learn more about the Bible, having conversations about faith, and asking hard questions of God. One wrote: "I had a lot of questions as a child about things like "Where's heaven?" and "What does God look like?" Now, as I learn more about faith, I see that it's not exactly a clear-cut response for any of these. However, I do know that regardless of the answer, I don't need to worry about it."

Another wrote, "My relationship with God is already very steady; however, I do like to wonder about these things because I feel like it makes my relationship with God become even stronger."

Colin, Victor, and Lulu, you help us to see what it looks like to choose love. The day you were baptized, the people of God celebrated God's love for you and the new life you are given in Christ Jesus. Now today we get to celebrate your love for God and others as you commit to living out this new life, living out your baptism.

Today you promise to act in ways that will help you to experience God's love and help you act with love in the world. You promise:

- to live among God's faithful people,
- to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
- to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
- to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and
- to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

These are things we do as God's people.

This is how we keep practicing and keep showing up for Team Love.

Thank you for committing to this team today. Your witness helps us all to keep practicing love in a world of conflict and pain.

People of God, our Gracious God, through our savior Christ Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, loves and forgives you always so that you can love.

