

“Only Takes Me – To Love”
14th Sunday after Pentecost
September 6, 2020
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Iao United Church of Christ

Romans 13:8-14
Matthew 18:15-20

Poem: Saying comes from St. Augustine

“God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us.”

I’d like to begin this morning with a quick prayer; this week has been a hard one on me, emotionally... I had let my anger get the better of me at times this week, and so let us go into prayer: “Most gracious God, we ask you to descend your blessings upon our house churches in our virtual world who join us from near and afar. In a time of political turmoil, continue to be the armor of light that we need in our path. Continue to show us the way of love; we know that you, Jesus, overturned tables out of anger. Help us to put that anger aside and always seek reconciliation. But also help to remind us that we need to stand firm in our morality, that we need to stand firm in justice; and that we need to be sure to reflect the light of Christ in our lives. In your many names we pray, Amen.”

Love has been one of those words that has carried a lot of mixed emotions – the inside deep feeling we get; the feeling we get that is directed at an object or another person. Example, Love of our spouses and/or love of our weapons. Love of our families and/or love of a constitutional amendment. Love that comes out from within us, either by words or actions, is connected

with – and here’s that phrase you have heard me say many times Iao Church, connected with our inward center. We have this deep emotional connection with our spouse. Deep emotional connection with our armaments. Deep emotional connection with our favorite foods. Certain kind of people or objects or words invoke that inward center feeling kind of love from within us – our grandchildren, our parents, etc. Many of us have in some way, felt this kind of love from within. What invokes our love Iao Church? What invokes your love brothers and sisters in Christ out in our virtual world?

In our reading from Romans this morning – Paul reminds us that the only thing we should owe to anyone in our lives is our love for them, and for others. How difficult is that beloveds, especially in the political turmoil we find ourselves in? I found that so difficult for me this week, especially in the political turmoil that we find ourselves in. How difficult it is to love when maybe some of us have felt the sting of abuse, physical or emotional abuse? I felt that sting this week—I do not consider my brother, who lost his life in Vietnam, as a “loser,” or any other hurtful word. How can we love anyone when maybe some of our beloveds are feeling a fist on their faces or words that are piercing the heart and soul. How can anyone love when a loved one is shot seven times in the back or is being shot because of the color of their skin. Here is the thing about **forgiveness – it is not automatic but a process of reconciliation and something that takes time.** Paul also reminds us that “love does no wrong to a neighbor.” Example – if you love me as a member of the community, why do you have to shoot me seven times in the back? What happened to “thou shall not murder?” It doesn’t matter which side we stand on or which uniform or not we put on. At some point in our lives, many

of us have felt that we were wronged. Paul lists the “You shall nots” as examples of what does not come from the lens of love. Adultery, murder, stealing, covet or anything else that is not loving toward another human being. We fall short on our “loving” – but we should always try to live in love – Amen Church? We should always try to live in love – especially at such a time as this.

Jesus then describes in our Gospel reading this morning on what the process of reconciliation looks like when we do fall short. “Go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.” In our context for today, it doesn’t say go and tell all our friends, family members or post it on social media so as to try and gain people on our side. Instead go to that person and have a conversation. If that person listens to you, you have regained that friend. That beloved community, as hard as it is to do at times is the loving thing to do that comes from within each of us.

Jesus then gives us further steps to take if they refuse to listen. “Take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” The people we take with us become our witnesses to reconciliation. But if they still refuse then take it to the Church – if they still refuse to listen, then let them go on their way. Again, the process of reconciliation is a “process” and is not automatic and takes a lot of work for everyone involved.

Beloved community, here is where love makes things difficult. We are called to love but not called to lose our sense of morals. If we see immigrant children in cages and say or do nothing – what does that say about our morals? What does that say about love of neighbor? If our society is riddled

with immorality, who is to stand with those immigrant children or the abused spouse – who is to bring “love” into a world filled with injustices? Where do our morals lie? Children and Youth carrying assault weapons – at what point do we place the lives of God’s children above amendments?

We can still love Iao Church, we can still love, but as a society, we can also insist on what Paul writes in our first reading – “You shall not commit murder.” I remember growing up in my Village in New Mexico where before we could even get a hunting license, we had to take a “Hunters Safety Course” first. Even after taking that course, our elders instilled this sense of respect for our armaments, respect and gratitude for God’s creatures that kept us fed and most importantly, **that the life of another human being was regarded as SACRED regardless of who they were or where they came from – period!** The law of love always superseded the love of money. The law of love always superseded the love of any amendment. The law of love always superseded the love of weapons.

Going back to our first reading in Romans, Paul tells us “you know what time it is...now the moment for you to wake from sleep.” We know what time it is church; we know what time it is brothers and sisters our in our virtual world. Time for us as a society to wake up from our slumber and get to work against the works of darkness. Time to put on the armor of light and live honorable lives that reflects back onto our communities, our state, our country and our world. Because of the love that we carry within us – means we do not stand by and watch while darkness works around us. With our armor of light – we reflect back onto our communities the Christ in us without complacency. The Gospel tells us to how to go and do something

about injustices – the problem is that conversations are not happening where they need to be happening. I have lost friends and family members in the past few years – I have prayed for them and have had to let them go – and continue to pray for them. An immigrant child in a cage does not fit with my sense of morals. An immigrant child in a cage does not fit in my understanding of the Gospels. But Iao Church, we can still reflect the love in us – Amen? We can still reflect the love in us. As difficult as it might be at times, we can still reflect our love without losing our morals.

I would like to close with this story. At a Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, a very cruel experiment was once performed. A healthy dog was anesthetized and its leg was broken and properly reset. The dog was given food and water as soon as it was awake, and every provision was made for its physical needs during recuperation. But everyone who dealt with the dog had been instructed not to show it any love or affection. Only a few days after the procedure, the dog shook with fear in this new world without love. Then he stopped eating. Gangrene set in, and it was obvious that the dog was dying. Once more it was given a sedative and the leg was treated. This time it was awakened and, in addition to meeting its physical needs, he was also given love. At first he was still afraid. Response was slow, but soon the love and affection began to have an effect, and he started to recover. Shortly afterward, the dog was healed. Love had dispelled the fear that was caused by its absence.

Beloved community – the power of love has a very healing quality to it – even in the midst of great darkness in our country. The law of love that is within each of us can be life changing to those we encounter in our lives. Let

us be that light of love that our country needs right now. Let us be in prayer and continue to speak truth to power because at some point – truth and truth telling have got to matter once again. Be the light – be the love from within.

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.