

## Wesley United Methodist Church

January 31, 2016

"Loving the Jesus Way."

I Corinthians 13:1-13

A tramp, one day knocked at the door of a Catholic Rectory. "Father," he said to the priest, "I've been floating around for a long time, and I was wondering if I could join your church and settle down?" "Why, yes," said the priest, "I'd be happy for you to do that, but first let's find out what you know about faith."

With Christmas coming, he decided to ask the tramp a simple and seasonal question. "Where was Jesus born?" Without even hesitating, the tramp said, "In Pittsburg." "No," said the priest, "I'm sorry, but it wasn't Pittsburg. Try again." "O.K.,...if he wasn't born in Pittsburg, it must have been in Philadelphia." And again, the priest shook his head and said, "No, I'm sorry, that's not right."

But then, not wanting to embarrass the tramp any further, the priest decided to just tell him. Very slowly he said, "Now get this, Jesus was born in Bethlehem." And the tramp's face lit up. "Yeah...that's right...I just knew it was somewhere in Pennsylvania!"

I don't know where the priest took it from there, but I have an idea he loved the tramp no less, expressed no exasperation or rudeness—because from the feel of the story, the priest was a person who loved the Jesus way—and that's the theme of our sermon today: Loving the Jesus Way.

Our first point: to love the Jesus way, we must love enough to keep ourselves in perspective. Paul said love is not boastful or arrogant or rude...In other words, Love is neither anxious to impress, nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.

Let that rest for a moment in your mind. There are plenty of instances where delusion, having inflated ideas about our own importance has had tragic and disastrous outcomes. Just to name two: Adolf Hitler in Germany and Jim Jones in San Francisco and Ghana. There are plenty more to add to the list. Their self-perception worked havoc in the world, and led to their self-destruction.

Some time ago, Ned McQuirter (Governor of Tennessee) showed an admirable side of himself in a brief anecdote which he wrote, and it was published in the newspaper. He said it was easy enough to get puffed up about being the Governor of the State of Tennessee, but luckily, Tennesseans have taken a keen ability to keep greatness in perspective. Then he told about an experience he had after the last gubernatorial election. He went down to his rural hometown Dresden. In a store on the main street, an elderly man stopped him. "Ned? Ned?, is that you?" Ned said that it was, and the old man proceeded to say that he had been seeing the governor a lot on TV and in the newspaper lately. The Governor confessed with some pride that that was true. Then the old man responded, "Well, I guess you've done pretty well for yourself, but just remember one thing no matter how rich or successful you become, the number of people at your funeral will still depend a hell of a lot on the weather."

That's right on target, isn't it? To love the Jesus way is to love enough to keep ourselves in perspective. And that means to be humble.

Now a second truth, when we love in the Jesus fashion, we are unselfish and are willing to sacrifice our own good and pleasure for the good and pleasure of another. Verse 5 says, Love does not insist on its own way.

When we talk of unselfishness and sacrifice, we need to reflect on whether we are willing to sacrifice our own good and pleasure for the good and pleasure of others—whether we are willing to make any kind of sacrifice that God's kingdom might be advanced.

A story from the Santa Monica United Methodist Church: Two men were talking about pledging and the church. One of them complained that the church was always asking for money, and that the preacher was forever trying to sell tithing, and push one mission project after another.

The other man broke in. "Let me tell you about my son. My son, like the church, has always been asking for money, almost from the moment he was born. A new pair of shoes, a new pair of jeans, a new toy. Then a bicycle, a football, a baseball glove. Then came the trips to the dentist, and then high school,

money for lunch, money for dates, more jeans and for taxes and insurance. Once he totaled the motor on the family car—everything was money—sometimes he appeared to be a walking dollar sign.

Then he went off to college, and there were unbelievable amounts for tuition and fraternity dues and ski trips and dates. Every time I turned around, there he was, asking for money.”

The man paused...he cleared his throat...and continued. “Last year, my 21-year-old son died of leukemia, and I would give anything if he were alive and asking me for money; and you know, that’s a little how I feel about my church. I would rather have it alive and doing something and asking me for money than dead and costing me nothing. I love my church and my Lord, and I suppose I could never give enough for all my blessings.”

That makes it pretty clear, doesn’t it? When we love in the Jesus fashion—loving in a way that does not insist on its own way—loving in a way that is unselfish—we are willing to sacrifice our own good and our own pleasure for the good—for the well being—perhaps even for the salvation of others. The story may be dramatic—maybe too much so—but how it challenges our selfish living, our self centeredness, our own pleasures, and our own pursuit. Jesus’ love can never be self centered, nor can we be if we love his way.

One more thing: Loving Jesus’ way is loving enough to believe the best. That’s where we began in our introduction. Verse 6 says: Love “does not rejoice in wrong, but rejoices in the right.” It doesn’t keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it shares the joy of those who live by the truth.

Let’s face it, friends. Not many of us are not guilty here. We don’t love the Jesus way. Now and again we find ourselves taking pleasure in other people’s sins, gloating over the wickedness of other people. We express this in the way we talk about other people’s failures. Love is not glad when things go wrong for others. When we look at the verses, it pricks our conscience and it strikes a weak point. It exposes our guilt. Love does not keep a record of wrongs.

A man was telling a friend about an argument he had with his wife. “Oh, how I hate it,” he said, “every time we fight, she gets historical.” “You mean hysterical,” replied the friend. “No, I mean historical,” he insisted, “she drags everything from the past and holds it against me.” We know about that, don’t we? But such is not the way of love. Love does not keep a record of wrongs.

Love does not stir around in the muddy waters of maliciousness. It’s unfortunate, but our tongues so often betray our Christian profession. Gossip is a vice enjoyed vicariously. There is this prayer that I need to pray daily. “Lord, make my words sweet and tender today for I may have to eat them tomorrow.” Have you ever had to eat your words?

You verbalized suspicions that were unfounded. You shared rumors that were untrue. You accused someone hastily because you misjudged his motives. You misunderstood a person and you lashed out in anger. You passed on a rumor only to discover it was false. Words can hurt, even destroy. And words can hurt us when we have to eat them. Maybe you would like to join me in praying, “Lord, make my words sweet and tender today for I may have to eat them tomorrow.”

So, there you have it--loving the Jesus Way. To love the Jesus way we must love enough to keep ourselves in perspective. Loving the Jesus way is to love enough to be unselfish and willing to sacrifice. To love the Jesus way is loving enough to believe the best. How is your love life? Are you loving the Jesus way?