

Wesley United Methodist Church

May 19, 2019

“The Eleventh Commandment.”

John 13:31-35

Former President Reagan told a humorous story during the last days of his administration. It was about Alexandre Dumas. It seems that Dumas and a friend had a severe argument. The matter goes so out of hand that one challenged the other to a duel. Both Dumas and his friend were superb marksmen. Fearing that both men die in such a duel they resolved to draw straws instead. Whoever drew the shorter straw would then be pledged to shoot himself.

Dumas was the lucky one. He drew the short straw. With a heavy sigh, he picked up his pistol and trudged into the library and closed the door, leaving the company of friends who had gathered to witness the non-duel outside. In a few moments a solitary shot was fired. All the curious pressed into the library.

They found Dumas standing with his pistol still smoking.

“An amazing thing happened,” said Dumas, “I missed.”

I am amazed how many Christians have been in the church all their lives and still have missed the Gospel. So many folks still live in the Old Testament, bound by legalisms, restricted by the “Thou shalt not” without being empowered by “Thou shalt.” Some are experts at the Ten Commandments, but absolute failures at the eleventh and most important of all.

Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

First of all, this is what Christ most desires out of us that we love one another. We may tithe. We may teach Sunday School. We may sing in the choir, serve on the official body of the church, even make visits on behalf of our church. All of these are wonderful. But if we do not love, we have missed the Gospel.

Lucy stands with her arms folded and a resolute expression on her face, while Charlie Brown pleads, “Lucy, you MUST be more loving. This world really needs love. You have to let yourself love to make this world a better place in which to live.”

Lucy whirls around angrily causing Charlie Brown to do a backwards flip and creams at him: “Look, block-head the WORLD I love. It’s PEOPLE I can’t stand.”

Some of us resemble that remark. We love the world. It’s people we can’t stand.

Love who? Why everybody. Nothing could be clearer from the Gospels than that. We are to love not only our immediate neighbors but also the cashier who checks our groceries and the cop who stops us on the expressway as well as the obnoxious people who cross our paths every day.

We are to put our faith in action through loving deeds. As someone has said, “We are judged by our actions, not our intentions. We may have a heart of gold, but so does a hard-boiled egg.”

There is a story about Christian love in action. Two Christian businessmen were having lunch in a downtown restaurant. The waitress serving their table dumped a bowl of hot soup right over one of these businessmen. Everybody gasped and stared. They just couldn’t wait for the manager to run out and fire the lady.

They just couldn’t wait for this man, standing there, dripping, with his suit ruined, to cuss this waitress out, but the man looked at that waitress and said,

“Young lady, I’m so sorry this happened to you. I know it embarrasses you.”

How would you have handled that situation? Can you love as the Master would us love? Can any of us do that? How? We must examine our text carefully.

Note that Jesus says, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

The commandment to love is not merely another legalistic requirement.

Rather, it is the natural response to the love we receive from Christ.

That love is an unconditional love. If we understand that we are loved just as we are, with no strings attached, it can transform our lives. How deeply we need to be loved unconditionally.

We love because he first loved us. We sing, “Love came down at Christmas...” and that is true. Not that love was not already in the world, but until Christ we did not see it walking, talking, and serving others. You see, everything we need to know about right and wrong is in the Old Testament. The problem is that the emphasis is on the negative. We are told what we should not to, but not as clearly what we should. Someone commented about the Ten Commandments, “They don’t tell you what you ought to do. They just put ideas into your head.”

You can take that a number of ways, but that person is right. The Old Testament includes commandments to love God and to love one's neighbor. However, we didn't see a loving God in action until there was Jesus. He showed us the content and the character of love. Then he went where no one has ever gone before.

He gave up his own life on Golgotha to show us just how far the Father will go to win back his lost children. When we understand love and make it our own, then we are able to love as Christ call us to love. But there is one more thing which must be said. Our love for one another is our primary witness to the world. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

A story about a preschool teacher shares what she thought was "burn-out."

She was a committed teacher whose heart went out to the so-called "disadvantaged child." She had begun to despair over some of the children who seemed so lost, so limited, and in some cases, so neglected at home.

In her growing frustration she was unsure between the feeling that there was something wrong with her, or that there was something wrong with this current "crop of preschoolers." They just don't respond like they used to.

Then her mother died.

It was necessary for her to take a week off from her teaching duties to attend her mother's funeral. She was very close to her mother. Following the funeral, she needed some time alone to deal with her feelings. Her frustration at the preschool seemed like an even heavier burden at this point in her life. After a weekend of aimless shopping, puttering in the garden and watching TV, she realized she must return to the classroom. She felt more like a soldier going into battle than a teacher of preschoolers. The first day back was about what she expected.

Her hurt and despair produced resentment which she kept carefully hidden.

She went through the paces like the competent professional she was.

She smiled at the right times and was patient considering the environment and her raw feelings. But then it happened. She had come around the corner to discover Rachel picking the last chrysanthemum from a pot in the hall. Rachel, by the way, was the most distant, most disruptive child in her class. In a stern, trembling voice the teacher demanded, "Rachel, what are you doing?"

Rachel held out in her little hand the flowers she had already picked.

"Mrs. Terrell, these are for you. You used to be like a mother. Would these flowers help you to be like a mother again I know you are fussed in your mind. Wouldn't you like some flowers?"

Mrs. Terrell thought, fussed in my mind? You mean it shows? To a five-year-old? She spoke, "Rachel, what is a mother like?" "A mother is like you used to be," Rachel said. "A mother likes being with children." "But Rachel," said Mrs. Terrell, "I like being with children. I've just...well, I've been...well, Rachel my mother... passed away, and..." Rachel quietly interrupted, "You mean she died?"

"Yes," said her teacher, "she died."

Rachel looked up at her teacher and asked, "Did she live until she died?" Mrs. Terrell thought what kind of question is that? "Well, honey, of course," she said, "All people live until they die; they..." Rachel interrupted again, "Oh, no they don't, Mrs. Terrell. Some people seem to die while they are still walking around.

They stop being what they used to be. Mrs. Terrell don't die just because your mother died. Be alive while you are alive."

Out of the mouth of babes. How do we witness to the world that Christ is alive? We do it by being alive ourselves. How do we witness to the world that God is love? We do it by loving one another.