

Palisades Presbyterian Church
Palisades, NY 10964
September 7, 2008

Readings:

Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 18:15-20

Called by Creation
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It seems we don't have much choice. There is nothing more fundamental to who we are. Layer it up in any way you like. Cover it up. Push it aside. It won't go away.

There is no getting around that we are called by creation to be in love with one another. And, we only have the time we have to do it, which is now.

All the rules of the world's religions, commandments, and otherwise all come down to, well, jumping in the pool – and loving each other as we love ourselves.

A little “plug” for our gathering this afternoon!

But, herein is the problem, at least for me: learning to love myself. I never really learned how to do that – well into my thirties. I'm sure someone, maybe many people, caring and wise tried to do that – but I had a secret, you see, and that secret meant several things:

- (1) You're not getting too close to me, because if you did – you might find out what I was hiding and I could not deal with that
- (2) All your kindness and affection would disappear if you really knew who I was
- (3) The love and promises you showered on me – were showered on who you thought I was, not the real me – so they didn't really apply.

I had to learn, through a lot of trial and error, that there were people that would love and accept me unconditionally, even though I was gay – some maybe even because of it! And until that happened, well, nothing got much better for me, and, truthfully, nothing got much better for those around me. I could not be who I was with others, so only part of me got through – and when that happens, something is always lost on both ends.

Once love broke through the barriers I had created around myself, once that happened, it breathed upon the eternal flame that is always there and slowly the love grew that even I began to feel it for myself, and as it grew it changed the way I saw others – and continues to influence the way I love others in sometimes slow and always surprising ways.

So, the direction to love our neighbor as ourselves, calls us first to learn to love ourselves.

It's sort of like the Serenity Prayer...

And Paul, writing about the "end of times" that they all believed was coming shortly, warns: "You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep." And in his exhortation, he is right – whether the end of times is imminent or eons away: this, this is the only time we have: and waking from sleep, waking from the impediments in our lives to fullness, into a love of ourselves which transcends into more to offer others – that needs to be done sooner than later – because it is the connecting of love to love, and that is the connecting of God to God, in ourselves and to one another.

And about the darkness...have you ever noticed there is a certain comfort in self-recrimination. For me, at least, it has been easier at times to be critical of myself, instead of gentle and forgiving of myself. When I read Paul's letter to the Romans, chastising the readers not to make any provisions for the flesh to gratify the desires, I don't hear a call to the monastic life (although some might). I hear a call to resist the temptation to enter into the darkness of separation and self-pity – a physical, as well as, spiritual and emotional place.

I have had times, truly, when I was more comfortable with things going badly, more able to manage the expectations of "one damn thing after the other" [Churchill's definition of history, by the way] than handling things when they were going well. It probably had to do with the fact that by expecting bad things to happen, I would never be disappointed when they did.

It wasn't until I started to love myself by accepting my human condition and recognizing that God, whoever God is, did in fact know and love me – that I became free to see that I didn't have to live in fear of the past, present, or future. As that faded, the space it left behind seemed to fill naturally with a desire to be present, still, in love, you might say.

So, I understand Matthew, as well, when he says that the laws would be fulfilled if we were all to live in such a place, and surely, as much as some of the texts are changed and redacted over time – this was central to the teachings and message of Jesus.

We all know that we're not there yet, but neither was I for a long time and I am still working on it. So, I know things, people, we – change. And, I know places where people get it and keep at it – this being one of those places.

You cannot be here for very long, before the hesitancy to connect with others dissipates, and suddenly, in some way, you find yourself happy you were here [and probably on a committee!!!]. Something is touched here - that for some of us has been left untouched or uncomforted or recognized for too long.

In community with each other, we discover how we are not all that different, how we have all felt the sting of mistakes, and have all felt the longing for meaning, fulfillment, and the safety and strength of love.

That kind of power or presence cannot be contained. It escapes to be free and carried out in all sorts of ways, touching others as it goes...

And it has the effect of changing the lives of all in the process, in some way or another. More so, it is abundant and unlimited, because, in truth, we find it just by recognizing what is already there. It is the fabric of the universe and of creation and we are called to it, for we are of it and it is of us. It is the call of Creation, of God.

There will always be moments of darkness, but in the Bible day always follows night, light always follows darkness. And in those times of shadows or deserts, part of who we are emerges that cannot surface in the bustle and busy of every day. We need both the dark and the light – maybe the dark to remind us that love of ourselves, forgiveness of ourselves is what we need to heal – and the light to practice sharing our love with others in need.

When I think of all being welcome at this table – I think of it as a place where seekers meet on their journey, to be nourished in love and community. We cannot be who we say we are trying to be and have any boundaries around any who join us. It is a table of Love.

Love – God: Wide, Wise, Forgiving, Understanding, Unconditional, and Calling us in a way that made us want to bring the Good News of loving as a way of living to everyone.

We may only get to see glimpses of the wonder in its fullness, but somehow today I know it, better than I ever have before. For me, that is quite a change. A miracle, I think.

As we begin this new year, whether part or none of this makes any sense, just being present makes the difference – and trust that God/Love will do the rest, as she has in the past!

I know it's so, because, to borrow from Jack London -

It's the Call of Creation.

Amen.