

**Message: Extravagant Love**

**When was the last time you really felt loved?**

There are a lot of ways we're loved. We're loved by our spouse, children, aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces, grandchildren and grandparents. We most often feel love during celebrations – anniversaries, birthdays and other special occasions. We feel that way less often during every day life.

**When was the last time you really felt loved at church?**

The church is the body of Christ, established for the mission of spreading the good news of Jesus so that people come to know Jesus personally. That's how lives are changed and made better.

Esperanza and I feel loved. But we know there are people who have been hurt by the church, those who don't feel welcome, those who feel like the church doesn't really care ....

I took a different approach to the sermon today. After reflecting on the Scriptures from the revised common lectionary, I'm left with a few thoughts.

***Way we wish life was ... open loving, multicultural***

Rev. Tom Widland posed an open question on Facebook this week, “if you don't regularly attend church, tell me why. No judgment, just honest feedback.” Here's a telling response.

“People sing about drawing the circle wide and say I can come as I am. However, I have to put on my church attitude and use my church words, and put on my church smile for people who don't even see me. I want the church to be the place I can be broken. Instead, it broke me and I constantly need to go away for a while to patch my heart up.

I want church to be like youth group. A place where you can come and get love and support. Talk about how the week was a struggle and laugh and pray with people who know me and allow me to be broken one week and their hero the next.” – April French

***Way life often is ... broken hearts, legalism***

Pastor Philip Yancy: “The church can become a place of un-grace.”

**One pastor said**, “When I preach a message about God’s Law and the penalty we suffer for our sins, no one complains. When I preach a message about God’s radical love, God’s inclusive love, God’s forgiving love, God’s all accepting love, all I hear is complaints.” In a world filled with hurt and pain, there’s one, great thing.

***Jesus is our only hope & greatest love***

Our Scripture for today, Luke 6:27-38, reveals the amazing depth of God’s love. The language isn’t easy. It shows us an amazing contrast between our normal, human response and the radical love we can show others by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It’s not sufficient to be good or to love others back or to help others out. It’s our intent that matters. Jesus calls us to love first, to be good to people who attack us for our faith, to help others without expecting them to respond.

Radical love goes beyond the golden rule.

***Extravagant love is so powerful we can even love our enemies***

Forgiveness is unique to Christianity. If we really want to love, we must learn how to forgive.

Our OT Scripture for today, Genesis 45:3-11, 15, shares the conclusion to the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who saved the Egyptians from famine. God brought good out of a bad situation: Joseph was able to be reunited with his family and to save his family, the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel, from starvation.

***Some highlights from Joseph’s story:***

- Joseph was probably a jerk when he was young. Father’s favorite son. The baby of the family. Mouthy, flashy.
- Result: his brothers hated him. They did a bad thing. They sold Joseph as a slave and then lied to their father, telling him that Joseph was killed and dragged off by a lion.
- Joseph spent years as a slave, was sent to prison. But he remembered his faith. God didn’t forget. God gave him the gifts he needed to deal with his life. Joseph was truthful and faithful.

- Result: God brought good out of bad. Joseph became the right-hand man to Pharaoh. God showed him that a famine was coming. Joseph prepared the Egyptians.
- A door opened. Joseph’s family was struggling to find enough to eat. They came to Egypt to buy grain. After a series of misadventures, Joseph and his brothers were reconciled.
- Result: God saved the people who would become the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel from starvation, ensuring their survival.
- Joseph, who had every reason to hate his brothers, to take his revenge on them, showed them love and forgiveness. Nowhere in Scripture do we see evidence of spite or hate from Joseph toward those who did wrong to him.

Joseph’s story shows us that God is always at work to bring good out of bad situations and circumstances. Even when another person does something hateful, hurtful or evil, God can bring good out of it. The situation is not good, but the faith, belief and love that honors God is.

***Healing (& full life) starts with forgiveness***

*“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you”*  
– Louis Smedes.

Rev. Smedes also said, “You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well.”

Forgiving those who have done wrong to us is hard. A lot of emotions are involved. Anger, for example. This isn’t a call to suppress, but to embrace it, recognize the fear that it touches on and to embrace the love of God to overcome it. After all, nothing is impossible with God.

Once we can forgive ourselves for doubting the power of God’s grace to act and bring good, then we find the first step toward forgiving those who have hurt us. The process takes time. It takes a willing heart. It takes an open mind.

It’s the way to healing and a life lived fully, without fear.

**Let go and let God’s radical love take control of your life.**

Let us pray ...

*God of grace and mercy, we come to you as broken people. There isn't a person in this room who hasn't been hurt. There isn't a person here who hasn't known moments of anger. We're afraid to embrace radical love because it will change us. We won't have those safe, comfortable defenses to fall back on. We'll be explorers on a path that feels risky. Forgive us, Lord, when we doubt. Help us to be willing to share our burdens with others and to take the time to listen and care when they share theirs in return. Make us into a community of trust, who help others to get back on their feet and continue on the path of love and forgiveness. Open our hearts and minds to the way of radical love. In the name of the one who forgave us from the cross, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

**Genesis 45:3-11, 15 (CEB)**

Joseph said to his brothers, “I’m Joseph! Is my father really still alive?” His brothers couldn’t respond because they were terrified before him.

Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me,” and they moved closer. He said, “I’m your brother Joseph! The one you sold to Egypt. Now, don’t be upset and don’t be angry with yourselves that you sold me here. Actually, God sent me before you to save lives. We’ve already had two years of famine in the land, and there are five years left without planting or harvesting. God sent me before you to make sure you’d survive and to rescue your lives in this amazing way. You didn’t send me here; it was God who made me a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household, and ruler of the whole land of Egypt.”

“Hurry! Go back to your father. Tell him this is what your son Joseph says: ‘God has made me master of all of Egypt. Come down to me. Don’t delay. You may live in the land of Goshen, so you will be near me, your children, your grandchildren, your flocks, your herds, and everyone with you. I will support you there, so you, your household, and everyone with you won’t starve, since the famine will still last five years.’”

He kissed all of his brothers and wept, embracing them. After that, his brothers were finally able to talk to him.

**Luke 6:27-38 (CEB)**

[Jesus said,] “But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other one as well. If someone takes your coat, don’t withhold your shirt either. Give to everyone who asks and don’t demand your things back from those who take them. Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you.

“If you love those who love you, why should you be commended? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, why should you be commended? Even sinners do that. If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, why should you be commended? Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be paid back in full. Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. If you do, you will have a great reward. You will be acting the way children of the Most High act, for he is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.

“Don’t judge, and you won’t be judged. Don’t condemn, and you won’t be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good portion - packed down, firmly shaken, and overflowing - will fall into your lap. The portion you give will determine the portion you receive in return.”