

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost – Year C
July 14, 2019
Deacon Cindy Roehl
Church of the Good Shepherd, Dunedin, FL

- SERMON –

A young pastor was sitting in a restaurant eating lunch. He opened a letter from his mother he just got that morning. As he opened it a twenty-dollar bill fell out. He thought: "Thanks, mom, I could use that right about now." As he finished his meal he noticed a beggar outside on the sidewalk leaning against the light post. He thought: "That fella could probably use the \$20 more than I."

So he crossed out the names on the envelope and put the \$20 in the envelope and wrote across the top in large letters. "PERSEVERE!" So as not to make a scene, he put the envelope under his arm and dropped it as he walked past the man. The man picked it up and read the message and smiled. The next day, while the pastor was eating his lunch, the same man tapped him on the shoulder and handed him a big wad of bills. Surprised the young pastor asked him what that was for? The man replied, this is your half of the winnings. "PERSEVERE" came in first in the fourth race at the track yesterday, and he paid 30 to 1.

If we go back to our scripture readings this morning, you will find another story. A wonderful story!

Right off the top our first reading gives us encouragement. In it we find a God who loves his children and wants their best. The Israelites had turned their back on him many times and even so, he is about to bring them into the land he had promised to them and tells them he will help them succeed, if they obey him and keep his commandments.

Wait! What? If they obey him?! And keep his commandments?! I knew there was a catch! What does that mean? And how do I do that?

Well, apparently the Apostle Paul *knew* we'd have that question because he explains it very well in his letter to the Romans. He said:

Whoever loves another person has fulfilled the Law. The commandments, 'Don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal,' and the others are all summed up in one word: ... love your neighbor as yourself. Love doesn't do anything wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is what fulfills the Law.

LOVE is what we need.

When our world gets stressful, know that others are stressed, too. When the news has wars, political battles, social justice disorder, know that others are going through these chaotic emotional trials just like we are.

These stresses in life are not new. 54 years ago, for instance, in 1965 racial marches and riots were taking place, including the famous civil rights march in Alabama.

On Palm Sunday of that year 47 tornadoes had hit the mid-west. Over one thousand people were injured and there were 271 reported fatalities.

In May the largest anti-Vietnam teach-in took place at the University of California Berkeley. Tens of thousands of people attended the event. In June of that same year the war in Vietnam had continued to worsen and President Johnson increased the number of US troops in South Vietnam from 75,000 to 125,000.

There had been so much strife and emotional upheaval throughout our country.

And in June of 1965 Hal David and Burt Bacharach put out a song that said:

♪ **What the world needs now is love** ♪

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love
No, not just for some but for everyone

This need was understood in the Old Testament time of the Israelites.

It was understood in the time of Jesus when the legal expert stood up and asked Jesus, "What must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus asked him, "What is written in the LAW? How do you interpret it?" He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, AND love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said, "You have answered correctly."

It was understood when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans when he said, "love is what fulfills the Law". It was understood in 1965, and it's understood today.

We knew it then and it's no different today.

♪ "What the world needs now is love, sweet love..." ♪

God told the Israelites, "This commandment that I'm giving you right now is not too difficult for you. It isn't unreachable. It isn't up in heaven somewhere or across the ocean somewhere so that we have to ask, "Who will go up to heaven or cross the ocean and get it for us that we can

hear it and do it? Not at all!” God said, “The word is very close to you. It’s in your mouth – and in your heart, waiting for you to do it.”

So, how do we put this into action? What does ‘Love your neighbor’ mean? Jesus gave a great example of someone loving his neighbor. But **our** neighbor might have a different situation going on than having been beaten by thieves, so how can we be sure to know what to do?

I just happen to have an idea. Galatians Chapter 5 tells about the fruit of the Spirit. And would you believe the very first word mentioned is love? As well as joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we use these as guidelines, we should be safe.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 says we are to encourage each other, and build each other up.

Love is a decision. Love is an action. It’s a decision to act in helpful ways toward my neighbor. And it’s a decision to not act in selfish ways that would harm my neighbor, to serve me at his or her expense. Like being critical when it’s not necessary, pointing fingers or being judgmental. Yes, there are times when we may need to confront someone, but be sure you’re confronting them – in love. Speaking the truth in love.

I will say that, as we continue to grow in our relationship with God, talking with him, studying his Word and allowing ourselves to spend quiet time with him, (yes, I said “quiet” time with him) these things will become a part of our lives. They will become more of who we are. They are, after all, ‘fruit of is Holy Spirit’.

Another help is found in Philippians 4:8 – which says, “From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise.”

Can you imagine making this thinking pattern a part of your every-day life and NOT being more loving, kinder, more patient and good, gentle, and having more self-control? My goodness, what a thought.

♪ “No, not just for some but for everyone” ♪

And so God helps us to love our neighbor, which is what he desires that we do. You do have the capacity to love others, precisely because you have first received God’s love for you. You know what love is like. It’s how God treats you.

One of my favorite prayers gets at this so well. It’s the post-Communion prayer we often pray:

Loving God, we give you thanks for restoring us in your image and nourishing us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood. Now send us forth a people, forgiven, healed, renewed; that we may proclaim your love to the world and continue in the risen life of Christ our Savior. Amen.