

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:6-8

Something to Think About:

“For the task and mission of Evangelism, an often-neglected dynamic is telling people that there is a God who has been looking out for the interests of all of humankind and the world in which they live, even before they knew. Evangelism is not just the beginning of a relationship with God. It is also the acknowledgement of God’s prior relationship with humanity . . . We were sinners. We were not yet aware of our salvation. But salvation had already been accomplished, and completed, in Jesus Christ.” James L. Jarrard

A friend of mine tells the story of preaching a sermon about God’s love being something real and particular, not an abstraction. The sermon related how God rejoiced in the whole creation and longed to know and be known by each of us. “God loves you,” the pastor said, addressing the individuals in the congregation. After the sermon, someone said at the door, “Pastor, if you really knew me, you wouldn’t say that about me.”

God really knows us and still loves us. God knows what is lovely about us and what is decidedly unlovely. God did not and does not arrive at a decision to love us, based on a catalog of our virtues and vices. Jesus reached out to people who were sick, to notorious sinners, to disciples who were slow to understand him and quick to desert him at the end. He laid down his life for friends and enemies alike. Jesus is our best visual aid for how God loves: across differences; in spite of weakness; disease, and sin; one person at a time; and faithfully, even at great cost. Thanks be to God!

But how is it that we love? What are the boundary lines that we have placed within our own hearts and lives? Is there a limit, or do we live under the knowledge that our call to love includes everyone? Someone recently told me that when it comes to loving people they are very particular, especially in our current environment. Well, to that person and to the rest of us who struggle from time to time with “loving our neighbor” I want to encourage you to really think about our call within this world.

I believe that one of the most challenging things that we, as believers and followers are called to do is to find the capacity to love one another. For many, there seems to be this list of criteria that needs to be in place when it comes to caring that deeply and opening our heart that wide. Often, we want some kind of proof that the person is someone we are going to like, respect; someone that is similar to us, someone that could in fact be a friend. But Christianity doesn’t work that way. We don’t get to pick and choose who wins the favor of our concern and devotion; which is undoubtedly a challenging responsibility for us as believers and followers to live with. But to live with it is exactly our call in this world.

Jesus reminds us that next to loving God with all that we have – we are to “love our neighbor as our self.” Talk about a tall order and yet it’s the very reality that has been laid in front of us. It’s the second most important thing next to loving our heavenly Father that Jesus took the time to teach us about.

So today I want to challenge you to think about the people in your life, or the people on the fringe of your lives that you struggle with. The ones you know, the ones you haven’t even met yet; the ones that you often walk away from, don’t really pay much attention to, or really give the time of day to. I encourage you to look at them – to really look at them in the light of God’s love and acceptance and to ask yourself how you might be able to love them too. How can you open your heart to the size that God is calling it to be opened? How can you follow through with perhaps the one thing that you might find to be the most difficult and challenging; while at the same time realizing that it is your Lord who is asking you to do it. How can you love that freely and that unconditionally?

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for loving us before we knew it. Create in us new and generous hearts, so that we may love everyone whom you love. Amen

