

***Revelation 21:1-6, John 13:31-35***

***word count: 1,435***

You learn about your neighbors' religion not by reading about what it teaches or even by attending their services. You learn about another's religion by observing how your neighbors act and live their faith in the world. How they are impacted by their belief and how they consequently influence the world around them is the true test.

One of our scriptures today talks poetically about a new Jerusalem, where God will reside amongst God's people. It speaks of a time when all things will be made new.

As over thirty of our church's women return from a Spiritual experience at Pilgrim Pines this weekend, another group of fifteen of us leave on Tuesday for Israel. We will tour the famous sites. We will walk through Nazareth, Capernaum, and stand up near where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, and down at the Jordan where he was baptized. A cable car will take us up to the fortress of Masada, and down to the caves at Qumran, where the Dead Sea scrolls were found. Some of us might bob like a cork in the Dead sea, before we go on to Jerusalem. We will see the Western Wall, the very real home of Simon Peter, and the more questionable archeological sites. We will sail on the Sea of Galilee, have quiet time in the Garden of Gethsemane and walk where Jesus walked. I will bring back water from the Jordan for the baptisms of two members of our Confirmation class, as they confirm their baptism by becoming Christians in two weeks.

We will steer away from stalls offering pieces of the true cross or the Ark of the Covenant.

This is going to be an exciting trip for us.

I am also working on finding side-tours for some of us who are interested in talking with Palestinian Christians and Israeli Christians about the tensions that exist in the Holy Land today. A local member of Christian Peacemaker Teams is setting us up with guides on our last two nights, if we choose to go with them to the places where the walls have been built, shutting people apart from one another. Their aim is to educate and work for peace. Their motto is,

“What would happen if Christians devoted the same discipline and self-sacrifice to nonviolent peacemaking that armies devote to war?”

Three major religions live in tension with each other, despite teachings of peace and co-existence. Distrust, violence, prejudice, anger...closest to the place where three groups of people name a God of justice, peace and love that cherishes them & the land.

The lesson from the Gospel of John is one which many Christians once attached a meaning that was anti-Semitic. “You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’” Jesus was speaking *to* Jews about another group of Jews. And, it is followed by this, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” What was once interpreted to mean that we should love a select group, presumably our own, has finally broadened through the centuries to make it clear that the Love Jesus commanded us to show is to all people; rich in their diversity, religious expression, nationality and ways.

His new commandment to his disciples was precisely this: Show your love. Love one another. By your love, they will know more about you than by anything else you could do. Jesus lived a life that embodied that love in a healing, feeding and teaching ministry.

The ability to love all—even the most unlovable of sorts, has always been the test. How can we hope to imitate, incorporate, live this love in our own lives?

I think it starts locally. In fact, I think it begins within the individual's own heart and spreads—if the individual has nurtured its growth carefully through an example of love's best expression.

Carl's professor, Dr. Kathleen Pendergast, used to tell him that she "kept him in her prayers." Many people say that others are in their prayers, and one can only take them at their word. What Carl learned later was that she had developed a system whereby she could list all of the people for whom she prayed every night and she fell asleep naming each one of them. They finally numbered over two hundred, and included people who had not been kind to her. One wonders what happens to change a person over time when their spiritual discipline is to go to bed at night setting aside the worries and pettiness of the day, and focusing instead on lifting others up in prayer until sleep falls.

If, as my Swedish uncle used to say, "Acid burns most the container it is held in," then what does love and forgiveness do to the vessel that chooses to fill itself with these things?

Sister Ann Mananaro was a physician and poet who lived, loved and died as a Sister of Loretto, working in El Salvador, with the poor. She died of cancer in 1993. She was only in her mid-40's. John Kavanaugh, who was with Sister Ann when she died, tells this story from her life:

"Once, while working in a neonatal intensive care unit, she struggled hard to save a five-inch premature baby named Tamika. The girl was left in the hospital, fated to die, unable to thrive, bereft of possibility. She smiled just once, cupped in Sister Ann's hands after weeks of being held, caressed and gazed upon. Then she died.

"After we two buried Tamika with the help of a generous funeral director, I protested to Ann that it all felt so meaningless and bleak. 'What on earth did Tamika ever have?' I asked. 'Well,' Ann said, 'she had the power to evoke love from me.'"<sup>1</sup>

An action-packed faith is the power of love in motion, which is the Christ principle dwelling inside each one of us. We are judged by our actions, not our intentions. We may have a heart of gold, but then, as someone once said, so does a hard-boiled egg.<sup>2</sup>

American poet Edgar Guest, tells a story of his neighbor—Jim Potter, the town druggist—a casual acquaintance with whom he only exchanged greetings.

When Guest's first born child died, he was overcome with grief. Several days later Guest went to the drug store, and Jim Potter motioned for him to come behind the counter. "Eddie," he said, "I really can't express to you the great sympathy that I have for you at this time. All I can say is that I am terribly sorry, and if you need me to do anything, you can count on me."

Many years later, Edgar Guest wrote of that encounter: "Just a person across the way—a passing acquaintance. Jim Potter may have long since forgotten that moment when he extended his hand to me in sympathy, but I shall never forget it—never in all my life. To me it stands out like the silhouette of a lonely tree against a crimson sunset."<sup>3</sup>

Some of us fall asleep worrying or running film-clips of our day through our heads, pausing at the emotional, stressful moments when we felt wronged or when we wronged others. A friend of the professor who fell asleep lifting up two hundred names in prayer, said after her death, "She became what her discipline fed her. She embodied the principle that she should find something to love in everybody. I pray that at the end of my life, people can say, 'When we were sick she came to us; when we needed help, she was there.' She truly cared. Hers was a life that was worthwhile."

A "new Jerusalem" is still the idea of poetry. If the highest of ideals from three major faiths cannot be enacted there in the cradle of their birth, they have to start somewhere.

At the last supper, Jesus invited his friends to eat and to drink. When they had eaten, he commanded them to love one another as he loved them, so that they would be known as his disciples. He is present at this table today in our desire to be disciples with hearts for love and forgiveness. Come, for all things are ready. Bring your pain and heartache to this table and eat and drink hope. This is an open table....

***Sermon Resources:***

1. As cited in John Kavanaugh's, "Imperceptible Life, Incomprehensible Death," *America*, 4-11 June 1994, 31.
2. Traditional saying
3. author unknown, "A Sympathetic Gesture." Sermon illustration in the public domain.

**Scripture for Sunday, May 2, 2010**

**Revelation 21:1-6**

I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life."

**John 13:31-35**

At the last supper, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Come prepared with construction paper containing all the colors of the rainbow: Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Hand out one sheet to each child, and ask the children if they know what order the colors of the rainbow are in. Let them know that there is a secret to remembering the order — the name of a make-believe person named "Roy G. Biv." Explain that the letters of his name stand for red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Tell them the story of the rainbow in the Bible, and how it appeared after the flood as a sign of God's promise that he would never again send a flood to destroy the earth (Genesis 9:11-16). Explain that the rainbow is a sign that God loves us and wants us to continue to live on the earth. Have the children stand up, hold up their construction paper colors and organize themselves as a rainbow, in the order of Roy G. Biv. Point out that children — like rainbows — are a sign that God loves us, and wants us to continue to live and enjoy the earth.