



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

December 31, 2017

Pastor Randy Ott

New Year's Eve Worship

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 90

Lessons: Isaiah 51:1-6 & Luke 13:6-9

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1:22-25

Love Deeply

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

We talked about it before, but in the English language "love" is just such a silly putty kind of word. It's stretched to mean a lot of different things. I got a pie this year for Christmas from someone. I love a piece of pie. I love my wife. Should those two words be the same right there? Really? Isn't that kind of a little lame? You'd think I'd have a better word to describe my feelings for my wife than the same one I use for a dessert. But this is how we are. This is our language. We talk about love of a lot of different things in a lot of different ways, and maybe sometimes it loses some of the meaning. Tonight our God tells us to **love one another deeply, from the heart**. What's he talking about? Pie? Or a wonderful wife?

In actuality, both of those fall short of the word that he's using because he's talking about the same word he uses to describe his love for us. I can think my wife is wonderful, but I'll never love her as perfectly as God loves you or God loves me. So this is what he's asking us to do. This is a love that always acts, that isn't looking for something from someone else. It acts to put the others' interests ahead of their own. This is a love that sees a need and meets it without waiting for applause or being told to do it ahead of time. This is a love that just loves for loves' sake, not because it's been earned or deserved. It's just a love that is so powerful within God that it had to be poured out on us in Christ, in the Gospel, in the Sacraments, because he just has so much love to pour out on us.

Now, as another year passes and you look back, and as another year lays ahead and you look forward, what does your God say to you? **Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth...** He's basically saying you believe in Jesus. The truth is just believing, and that is a gift of God. That is not something you do. So now that you are a Christian, now that you are a believer, love your brothers and sisters in Christ. **...love one another deeply, from the heart.**

Why? Because **you have been born again, not of perishable seed**; because everything else is going to pass away, but you've been born of imperishable seed. Think about what that means for you. The imperishable seed is the Gospel. It doesn't wear out, pass away, get thrown away. The Gospel is eternal. Think of what that means for you and the opportunities to love each other that are included in that truth.

We had a candlelight service, right? You light candles and give them to kids. What happens when you give kids candles? Sometimes not good things, right? One year a kid started his hair on fire. I really wanted to tell him it was on fire, but I didn't really want to offend him or embarrass him, so I just waited until half his face burned away. Then finally someone else noticed and they put it out. I wouldn't want to presume to judge that he was on fire. I just wanted to be loving and tolerant of a burning child's face. You think I'm an idiot, don't you? And you know that never happened, don't you?

But think about how at times people have their hair on fire spiritually, and you and I don't want to love them deeply because we might offend them or appear like we're judging them or appear harsh. See the parallel?

If we're going to love other people **deeply, from the heart**, that means we're going to use the imperishable Word to help those who are perishing. That's one of God's truths. We do it in love. We do it in kindness. All the things we talked about this morning. But there are some times when we are just going to have to put ourselves on the line because we don't want to see someone perish. So that means we share the imperishable Word. The message that Christ lived and died for all of our sins; that there's nothing that is so great that he won't welcome us back with open arms.

Since that is the case, that is then also how we are to love one another; always willing to show love even to those who have hurt us deeply; always willing to throw open our arms and assure them of that love that not only their God has for them, and that our love is imperfect compared to God's, but we're sure working on it to keep loving them. That's what he's called us to do.

This is our God. This is his love. He wants us to grow in the ability to love and get better at it all the time. Not love the way the world loves. He said love deeply. He didn't talk about love superficially. There is a lot of superficial stuff in our lives, isn't there? A lot of our greetings at times are superficial. Ask someone how they're doing and they say "Ah, okay," that means it's awful, right? We're kind of superficial in our greetings at times, so sometimes you have to read through what they're talking about.

Don't be superficial with your love. Don't let it just stay with platitudes and nice words. Let it show in actions. And let it show in looking over someone else's faults and then loving them like God does. Not overlooking their faults in the sense of not correcting them when they're caught in sin, but not being always so eager to nitpick everything. There's a difference there, right?

This morning, here's an example. I'm not going to talk about not starting service on time. But this morning, in first service, when I was mocking the weather outside, I said "this God-forsaken state." I'm talking about the cold. I'm mocking the weather. If you know me at all, you know that's what I'm doing. But when I walked down those steps after first service and I got in that room, I thought *I shouldn't have said "God-forsaken" because God doesn't forsake any of us*, which is what I said the whole rest of the sermon. *But someone is going to be upset with me and chew me out because I said, "this state is God-forsaken."*

It didn't happen. But I remember days when it did over things that are like that. It always seemed like people were ready and eager to pounce when you said something you really probably shouldn't have, you could have said it better, and they wanted to just let you have it.

Another example. Christmas Eve Day we had the choir concert at 8:00 a.m. service. That was that day. Did you notice there was something missing in that service? Not a sermon. You probably didn't notice that. We didn't have the Lord's Prayer. Did you notice? I did when I was in the front and I went on to the next thing and thought, *There's no Lord's Prayer. We don't have one coming. Do I need to circle around and stick the Lord's Prayer in here someplace? Or is someone going to be upset that we had a service without the Lord's Prayer and now I should be removed from the ministry?* That's in the history of our congregation.

I didn't have anyone say a word to me about it. So are we getting better at loving and overlooking stupid flaws like that, when you forget something in a service? Or when you misspeak? Are we getting better at loving **deeply, from the heart**, where we're doing things now, like Soup for Souls, or our Food Pantry, where we're trying to put this love into action and we aren't just saying *what could be wrong with it?* Instead we're seeing how it can be a way to show love as a congregation. There's a part of me that thinks we're getting better at this.

There's also a part of me that knows I need to get better at it because some days I still want to nitpick, and I don't want to love **deeply, from the heart**. I want to say *You screwed up here, here, and here, and you shouldn't have done that!* But if it isn't a matter of someone's spiritual hair on fire, can't I just love that person and find a better way of doing it than going *You screwed up?* Is that a part of how God wants us to love **deeply, from the heart?**

Build each other up. Encourage each other. And help each other to get better instead of only pointing out each others' flaws. Flaw pointing out is easy. It's not hard. Look real close. You'll see one of my shoes is untied and I'm terrified I'm going to step on the lace and fall. I'm probably way to close to the steps now because of that. See, flaws are easy to find.

But love? That encourages? That points one another to Christ? That uses the imperishable Word to speak God's encouragement and truth to people who are perishing? That's us. We are the grass that withers and falls away.

Maybe this last year you went through horrible things. Maybe this next year you'll go through horrible things. Maybe last year you had joys. Maybe next year you'll have joys. My guess is that you're going to have both. But I guarantee you that sometime during the next year, you're going to need someone to speak the imperishable Word of God to you, to encourage you. That's what all the rest of you are here for. Grow in that Word so you can speak it to one another. That's what our God has called us to do. Love each other **deeply, from the heart.**

Yes, we're going to mess it up. But in Christ, we are forgiven. And that forgiveness empowers us to go forward and work at loving each other better and more deeply tomorrow than we did yesterday and today. Amen.