



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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July 18, 2010

8th Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: [Romans 12:9-21](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Deuteronomy 24:17-22](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 25](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 12:9-21](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 10:25-37](#)

What “Love Your Neighbor” Looks Like

The expected
The unexpected

From the Gospel that I just read to you from Luke 10, that guy that was there testing Jesus, did he sound like a little kid to you? Like when the parent gives the command and the kid immediately finds the exception or a way out of actually keeping the command, right? “It’d be nice if you take out the garbage before I get home.” You get home and the garbage is still sitting there. “Well, you said it’d be nice. You didn’t say I had to”...isn’t that what this guy sounds like? “Love your neighbor as yourself...but who is my neighbor? Let’s get a little more specific about this. You can’t obviously mean you want me to love everybody.”

Jesus then tells the story of the Good Samaritan which says anyone that you can show love to, that’s who you should show love to, right? Anyone that is in need of your love, that’s who you should love. That’s your neighbor.

But to flesh it out a little more, I suppose you could say, are the words I just read to you towards the end of Paul’s letter to the Romans. If you want to see what “love your neighbor as yourself” looks like a little more than someone beaten up by the side of the road, I guess you would read these verses, these three paragraphs that I just read to you, right? As you read them, there are some things in there I think you expect to hear. “Love must be sincere”...no one loves someone that is putting on a false front. That makes you sick, doesn’t it? “Love must be sincere”...that’s expected for what “love your neighbor” looks like. You don’t want anyone being fake and sickly sweet to you. You know people like that and you can’t stand it, right? So that’s expected...love must be sincere.

But there are some other things in here that are a little unexpected and it kind of makes you go “Huh? Really? You really want me to do that God?” Then you see just how far we fall short of both the expected and the unexpected when it comes to loving other people.

Look at what he says. “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” Hate what is evil; cling to the good...that makes good sense, right? You show love to your neighbor by hating the evil, the things God said “Don’t do.” Don’t steal. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t murder. You go through the Ten Commandments of things to do and not to do, and if you don’t do the things you are supposed to do and do the

things you aren't supposed to do, that isn't showing love to your neighbor. It isn't showing love to anyone, so hate that. Hate that which God describes as evil and cling to that which God describes as good. That makes sense to me. I can expect that when I'm told to love my neighbor. I don't expect God to come to me and say love your neighbor by beating him to a bloody pulp. That wouldn't make any sense. So hate what is evil and cling to what is good.

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love"...have this kind of concern for one another and be devoted to one another. That might start being a little more unexpected because "devoted"...I can see being devoted to my spouse because I love my spouse with all my heart, but being devoted to some of you guys like that? That doesn't sound quite right, does it? Some of you guys rub me the wrong way. You know people like that. No matter what they do...they say "Hi" to you and it kind of gets you a little irritated. God says I'm supposed to be devoted to even those people the way I am devoted to my family. We obviously fall short in that, don't we?

Then he says "Honor one another above yourselves"...that's a little unexpected, isn't it? Honor others above myself? Maybe love others, okay, but honor? I guess I'm not supposed to go around saying the things that I think, huh? I'm not supposed to act in the way I often want to act towards other people. Honor them above myself...here's where we get tripped up, isn't it? We love ourselves and we at times will honor and look up to others and love others because it's beneficial to us. Here he's telling us don't do it just because it benefits you. Honor them because it benefits them. That's a tougher calling for you and me.

Then he even goes so far as to say "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." "Never be lacking in zeal"...that's kind of unexpected. God can't expect us to be zealous for showing love to other people at all times and in all places. He can't expect it before we have our first cup of coffee in the morning, can he? To be zealous before we are even fully awake...that can't be what he's talking about. To be zealous in loving other people...if I want to be zealous in other people, that means I need to let go of the things that I want to hang on to that I don't like about other people, right? That means I have to be willing to forgive as I have been forgiven, at all times.

We carry the name "Christian," right? Christian literally means "little Christ." To have the zeal to serve others like Christ had the zeal to serve us...not coming up with excuses, not saying "yes, but they did this to me so it's alright if I do this"...be zealous at all times, to love and honor them above myself? How in the world can anyone possibly do that? That's an outrageous demand, isn't it? That's an impossible demand. Sure it is, but that doesn't mean it isn't there.

If we want to get better at it, look at what he says, "keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." Do we look at other people that we come into contact with every day of our life, the people that we like, the people that we don't like, the people that chew with their mouth open, the people that smack their lips too much, the people that are annoying in

the work place, the people that just annoy the dickens out of us...do we look at them as an opportunity for us to serve the Lord? That's an interesting concept, isn't it?

How I interact with others, how I show love to them is a way that I serve my Lord. It's a way of saying "thank you" to Jesus that he did all of this perfectly because we so often have failed. He did this perfectly in our place and our spiritual fervor clings to this truth that Jesus took away our sins and now when God looks at us, he looks at us as people who love perfectly, even though we don't. So when I keep my eyes on serving the Lord and spiritual fervor, that's going to help me be a little more zealous. It's going to help me look at other people not as obstacles or annoyances but objects of love that I can use to say "thank you" to God by loving them as a way of loving God.

He continues, "Be joyful in hope"...I can understand that I can love my neighbor and be joyful because I have the hope of heaven. I can be joyful in my day-to-day life because I have this confidence that I am forgiven and God loves me and God loves you.

But be "patient in affliction"...when I'm focused on my hope, I can be joyful. But patient when I'm afflicted? That's a little different. That's unexpected, isn't it? When we are afflicted, don't you find yourself more often saying, "Why are you letting this happen Lord? What's wrong with you God? Why are you doing this? Get this out of my life. I don't want it here. Take it away now!" But be patient? And then being patient as a way of connecting that to loving one another...it makes sense when you think about it, doesn't it? When you are impatient, when you're suffering, when you're in affliction and you're impatient and you're saying "why God" and you have all those thoughts running through your head, do you find yourself snapping at other people a little quicker? Do you find yourself taking it out on your spouse or your family a little more quickly? Do you find that guy that annoys you at the workplace someone that you answer a little more harshly than you normally would when you're afflicted by some sort of suffering, some sort of difficulty, some sort of crisis? Sure you do. That's why God reminds us to work hard at being patient and putting our trust and our love in our God. The more patient we are in affliction, the more we will reflect Christ's love and people will see it and they'll ask us why? And we can answer why we want to love our neighbor and tell them about the love God has had for us and for them.

"Be faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality"...those are all things I think we'd expect when it comes to loving our neighbor. Praying for our neighbor. Sharing with those who are in need. That we can easily see and we can probably do some of those things a little more easily.

But when he says "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse"...and when he says "Do not repay anyone evil for evil"...and when he says "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath"...that's a little more unexpected. That's a little more difficult for you and me, isn't it?

It's what we've grown up with, the idea that if someone has persecuted me, I have the right to persecute them. Isn't that what we grow up with? What's the answer to when

there are two kids arguing, fighting, when they are swinging and screaming at each other? What's the first thing each of them says? "He started it." Right? As though that justifies what they are doing. "I have every right to swing this book at my sibling because he started it."

As we get older, we keep the same thought, don't we? "He persecuted me. I have every right now to think badly about him, to say bad things about him and to attack that person. I have every right to run down their good name when I talk to other people. I have every right to repay evil for evil." That's what our sinful nature says. That's what our sinful nature wants to do, and very often that is exactly what we agree with. We never grow out of "he started it so I have every right to do this."

But our God says "when you grow into Christ, when in Christ you are a new creation, turn things upside down. Do the unexpected. Bless those who persecute you. Do not repay evil for evil. Do not take revenge. Instead, on the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink." I suppose the Lord would also say that if he's running down your name, talk up his good name. Do not repay evil for evil.

That's hard and you and I probably fail at that daily. If not in our actions or our words, most definitely in our thoughts. You and I can't stop and pat ourselves on the back because we didn't answer them in words. Even though we only thought it, you and I have sinned. Sin that we embrace in our thoughts crouches at the door and eventually springs into our actions.

There's only one answer to the sin that you and I commit in failing to love one another and failing to love those the Lord has placed over us. That answer is Jesus Christ...his perfect life in our place, his death in our place, the Spirit who has led us to believe that life and death takes away our sins. That's why we do not want to be overcome by evil, but we want to overcome evil with good. It reflects the faith we have that Jesus is our Savior. It lays the groundwork for proclaiming Jesus as our Savior to others.

Now to say, "I haven't done this perfectly. I can't share my Savior"...that's wrong. You can say "I have sinned and I know the joy of forgiveness and of knowing that God has taken away my sins. I want you to know it as well. I'm not telling you about Jesus because I'm perfect. I'm telling you about Jesus because I'm forgiven."

I think the Lord kind of gets at that when he says to us "Do not be proud." We'd expect that, but then he says "take this and put it into action. Be willing to associate with people of low position." Don't be proud, but be willing to associate with others that people would raise their eyebrows if they saw you with them or their tongues would start wagging if they saw you associating with them...that's what our God is telling us to do. That's unexpected. "Don't be proud, sure, but don't ask me to act on it God. Don't ask me to actually go and talk to those people"...but that's what he does. It's interesting the doors he opens when you start doing this.

I was in South Dakota for a week. My brother-in-law owns a bar there and I did a lot of work, family help, to repair some things around the bar and do some work for him. We were there just about every day from open until most of the time the end of the day and then back later in the night for supper. Over the years I have gotten to know some of the people that are there from open to close. It's interesting to sit and talk with some of them. It's an interesting observation you make that the more you drink, it isn't that you get smarter. You hear some really silly, foolish things. Some stupid things come out of people's mouths. But as you sit and talk with them and get to know them and talk with them and talk to them like they are your friend, it's interesting since they know I'm a pastor the things they will come and talk to me about when we sit at the corner of the bar.

It was an interesting ministry that I got to carry out at times in those days of sitting there and talking to people. I got to meet some really interesting people and share Christ with them. But if I start hanging around bars in the Southern Brown County area so I can minister to people that are caught up in alcoholism and other difficulties, what do you think is going to happen? Probably for the sake of the good of the Gospel here, I can't do that here. But I'm betting some of you are already sitting next to them, and you know the people that are the drunks and the idiots that you don't want to talk to but you want to sit at the other end of the bar away from them. Maybe our Lord is going to use us to go and share with them the hope that only the Gospel gives. Some of these people are just crushed by guilt.

You and I have the answer to guilt, don't we? We have the answer. Jesus Christ took away all of our sins. You and I have the answer that some of these people are trying to find in the bottom of their glasses. The question is, are we going to not be proud and actually speak up and share it? If we love our neighbor, I guess we'll talk.