

Sermon – March 22, 2022

Mark 12:28-44

What a month we've been through this past week. [pz]

So many things turned upsidedown. So many rituals disrupted. The one thing that remains, no matter the particulars, is our call to love our neighbor and to be the church in the world, whether we gather in person or via phone or Zoom or Facebook or any other means, keeping our physical distance.

"You are not far from the kingdom of God" – Jesus says to the scribe. To love neighbor as yourself puts you as close to the kingdom as you can get here on earth.

What does that mean? Love your neighbor as yourself.

When you feel safe, that no virus is going to get you down – how do you love your neighbor? By staying distant so **your** strength does not become your neighbor's weakness.

Yes, my friends. Right now, loving neighbor means keeping your distance, while you love them and care for them with all your heart.

I've spoken with several people over the past week, and am grateful to hear that having a means to worship, even from home, has greatly impacted the emptiness they felt when they could not come to worship and fellowship together as has been their norm. Please, please – sing along with the hymns, respond to the prayers, and share the virtual peace of the Lord, as those things occur during worship.

Take a chance and try a new computer program if it will keep you connected. I have been using Zoom for synod and conference meetings over this past year. It really makes a difference to see people's faces on the screen. But if a phone conference is the level of technology in your comfort zone, try that.

Hey – a phone call one-on-one or a card of encouragement will be a welcomed connection. [pz]

This is how we love each other. We stay connected by whatever means possible. We are social creatures. As Christians, we feel led to gather, to share, to hug, to console. At this time we are called to gather in a different way. We strengthen our faith through the word and we give of ourselves as we consider the health and wellbeing of others. [pz]

We are still church, even if we cannot gather. We are church – because we continue to love our neighbor and show Christ's love in this world.

The widow had but 2 coins to give, yet in her faith, she gave her all. Now – I heard that the original readers of this text would have a visual and an auditory understanding that we might not realize. In the temple were large metal vessels for offerings.

The wealthy were sometimes known to convert their offering to coins to make a loud and noisy display of their wealth. Those two pennies given by the poor widow would sound quite feeble in comparison. But – Jesus says – she gave out of her poverty, everything she had. She gave out of faith, not out of showmanship.

Our faith, our wealth, is in the small things done with great love.

We talked about Saint Therese and her “Little Way” this past Wednesday during midweek Lenten service. She has a whole chapter devoted to her in “Stranger God – Discovering Jesus in Disguise” – our Lenten Book study. She is revered for her “little way” of doing small things with great love.

Small things done with great love make great impact on those who are on the receiving end of what seems small to us, but huge in their lives.

I visit Annie’s restaurant about once a week. [pz] Well, I will be visiting it again when I can.

Trina, the owner, named the restaurant for her adopted daughter, Annie, who has a growth disorder – she grows faster than normal. Anyway, Trina has a sign right by the door – *To the world, you may be just one person, but to one person you may be the world.* I think she put that up because she is the one person who is the world to Annie. And Annie is the world to her.

What if we lived fully into that idea? To one person, you may be the world. What more could you ask for? To be just one person’s hero? Doing all things with great love – that is, loving our neighbor; that is, giving out our faith, not out of our abundance, not out of what is left over, but leaning into a promise – God’s promise of “enough for all”.

The “little way” is something you can start to practice right away. You don’t have to do big showy things to share God’s love. You can practice doing small things with great love TODAY.

In the line at the grocery store, in your car when others make risky and infuriating moves in traffic; listening to the opinions of those you disagree with and seeking to understand where they might be coming from – Making a phone call and listening to the cares and concerns of another.

When you forgive, when you give up your need to be right, when you realize that a leader has faults and failings and you can still treat them like a human being – you are practicing the “little way” of St. Therese.

There have been a number of church leaders out there who have said, “We will not live in fear; God will save us – so we are going to continue worshiping in person rather than follow the guidelines of the CDC” – [pz] Well, maybe God is saving us by giving us medical professionals and scientists to guide us through this pandemic. [pz]

Do not live in fear. Live in faith as Apostle Paul said in Rom. 14:8 *If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.* [pz]

I admonish you - Live in faith as the widow who gave her all. Live into the greatest commandment to love your neighbor by distancing yourself for a while.

We have the means to stay connected – You have lived through more technological changes than you know, from the technology of the party line phone to the ability to meet in groups via internet Zoom, or other means. Trust that God is in technology too.

I invite you to be the world to at least one person this week, as we remember that we belong to Christ Jesus.

As Apostle Paul reminds us at the end of the 13th chapter of First Corinthians – Faith, Hope and Love abide, these three – and the greatest of these is Love.

[pz]

Stay safe, stay strong, stay patient in the midst of real and manufactured chaos. You belong to God – Live to the Lord each and every moment.

Amen