

## **Welcome to Worship**

-Prayer cards & Connect Cards, along with gift bag for guests.

### **\*Hymn**

*Jesus Messiah*

### **\*Passing of the Peace**

## **Sharing of Joys and Concerns & Pastoral Prayer**

-Prayer Board:

-Prayer Chain: Prayers for the family of Madden, the young boy who died this week falling from a hotel window.

-General Conference of the United Methodist Church begins on Tuesday.

*The chapel space is available anytime the building is unlocked if you'd ever like a quiet space to sit, read, pray, or otherwise escape from the busy-ness of your day for a time.*

### **Lord's Prayer**

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

### **\*Hymn**

*All the People Said Amen*

**Scripture**

1 John 3:16-24 (NRSV)

*We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us — and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?*

*Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.*

*And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.*

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Children's Moment

-Good morning, children of God! How do we show that we love God? We can do it by going to church, reading the Bible, praying, and all that. Those are all very good! But the Bible tells us another, very important way that we can show much we love God. We can show we love God by loving others.

-So how do we show love for other people? Does saying, "I love you" do the trick? Is that all we need to do? Maybe for some, but maybe you've also heard the expression "actions speak louder than words." We want to do more than just tell people how we feel; we should show them, as well.

-My daughter, Esther, loves Daniel Tiger. And there's an episode that teaches us that there are so many ways to say "I love you." It might be by baking cookies for someone. Dancing with someone. Sharing a story. Making a gift. Taking time for a walk. When we do things for and with other people, it allows them to understand not only how we love them, but how God loves them.

-The Bible shows us that we should love not just with words, but with actions and truth. Loving others isn't always easy. But God loves us, and gives us an example of love. Because of what God has done and does for us, we can love God and others. So I want to encourage you to find ways to show you care for other people. Live in a way that shares the love of God. Let's pray!

-Dear God  
Your love to others.  
For all that you are  
Amen.

Thank you for giving us Jesus.  
For we love you  
And all that you do

Help us to pass on  
And we praise you  
It is in your name we pray.

**\*Hymn**

*I Will Rise*

## Sermon

### *We Abide in Christ*

Will you please pray with me and for me? O Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each and every one of our hearts be holy and pleasing to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

As a child, I enjoyed reading comic strips. In many ways, I still do, but I don't seek them out quite as vigorously as I once did. Some of the comic strips that I really enjoyed included Garfield, the Farside, Dilbert, and even Calvin & Hobbes. I have to admit that sometimes those strips had messages or themes that went over my head as a young child, but I appreciated the hijinks of the characters and stories nonetheless. We even had some of the books that collected the strips into one collection, so I wouldn't have to rely on old stacks of newspapers to read the stories.

Calvin & Hobbes in particular is one that I found myself returning to time and again. Now, as an adult, I have found a new appreciation for some of the stories and themes that Bill Waterson, the creator, touched on his work. In one strip in particular, Calvin discovers his activist side when he and his stuffed tiger, Hobbes, stumble upon a clear-cut in the forest. Calvin exclaims in surprise, "Hey! What happened to the trees here? Who cleared out the woods? There used to be lots of animals in these woods! Now it's a mud pit!" Hobbes, coming to life as he does, notices a nearby sign that reads, "Future site of Shady Acres condominiums." Upon hearing Hobbes read this aloud, Calvin exclaims in exasperation, "Animals can't afford condos!"

Now filled with a righteous indignation, Calvin wants to act. He asks, "Where are all the animals supposed to live now that they cut down those woods to put in houses?" He then lands upon a rather clever rhetorical question, "By golly, how would *people* like it if animals bulldozed a suburb and put in new *trees?!?*" Calvin and Hobbes both stare

for moment, as the possibilities of Calvin's question become apparent. In the final frame of the strip, Calvin and Hobbes go into full activist mode, searching for the keys to the nearby bulldozer so that they can head to town to raze some houses and plant trees.

This particular *Calvin & Hobbes* comic is somewhat relevant for today, on the eve of Earth Day, a global observance that draws attention to environmental concerns, and the need for robust protection and accountability for all of creation, and not just the areas that relate directly to human life. Calvin's thought process in the comic, from his discovery of environmental change, to his frustration and anger over the harm done to animals, to his decision to act all evoke a question: what does it mean to commit one's self to a just cause? Calvin recognizes that caring about justice cannot simply involve having feelings or expressing condemnation. It must also involve actions, a response. It requires an immense transformation of our presence in the world.

Even beyond the lines of a comic strip, we see that radical shift of behavior in the real world. Christians and non-Christians alike throughout history have been called into radical activism and even martyrdom for the sake of something they believed in deeply. Civil rights leaders like John Lewis and Martin Luther King Jr. put their lives on the line to challenge deeply entrenched racism and win justice and civil liberties for themselves and their people — even if they weren't able to see this come to fruition. Young activists like Greta Thunberg have been boycotting school on Fridays to protest global political leaders' lack of action on climate change. The intense fear, grief, and anxiety brought on by learning about climate change has moved many young people to join those efforts since 2018. In 2016, indigenous activist at Standing Rock, North Dakota physically put themselves in danger to protect the sacred sites and natural resources threatened by

the Dakota Access Pipeline. Thousands gathered to physically protect that piece of land, many of whom were motivated by faith. Whether we agree with their methods or motivations, whether they are Christian or not, these folks loved their communities and God's world so much that they felt they had to take radical action in their own lives to make necessary changes. These activists are motivated by love into non-violent action. Which then begs the question: If the Spirit of Christ is alive in us, how then shall we live? As faithful Christians, how will we bear fruit of God's love, and how will we heed the call of God to love all of creation?

Ultimately, that is what is at the heart of our reading from 1 John today. It is about what it means to commit ourselves to a just cause — the ultimate just cause, that of following Jesus as our Lord and Savior. The transformation demanded is no less great and our beliefs matter. What Calvin and Hobbes believed about the destruction of the forest directed his action; and our belief in Jesus should lead us to live a new kind of life. We should be putting our hearts into it.

That's the expression we might use. Put your heart into it. That's how we indicate something is really important. That's how we show we are really committed, really involved, really connected. Put your heart into it. When we really mean it, our hearts are in it. When they aren't, when we are half-hearted or worse, then nothing happens. Or nothing of significance anyway. So every now and then we should ask ourselves if our heart is really in it. Every now and then, we should test ourselves to see if this is something we are committed to doing. That's part of what John is getting at in this letter. He references the "heart" all over the place. There is the idea of being total committed, laying down our lives for one another. The temptation here, though, is that we try to

make this more spiritual. We sacrifice a *little* time and a *little* effort for one another. That's pretty good, isn't it? We don't *really* expect or call for much more than that, do we?

Well, maybe let's take a closer look at John's letter, and in particular verse 17: "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?" That last phrase — "and yet refuses to help" — sounds a bit different in Greek. It reads, "*kleise ta splagchna auto.*" It's a fun little expression, which requires a little explanation. We need to understand that in the ancient world, the seat of emotion wasn't the heart. The heart represented thought and will. When you do something with your whole heart, you are doing it as an act of will. It has less to do with emotion than it does with decision.

The emotional center of the ancient world was actually a bit lower than the heart. The word *splagchna* is the word for bowels. So a more literal translation of verse 17 reads closer to "If we have the goods of this world, but when we see a brother or sister in need, we close our bowels against them, how does God's love abide in us?" Move past the initial ick factor, and think about it. When you get that phone call in the middle of the night, and, as you feared, it is bad news of some sort, what do you feel? Where do you feel it? There's that queasiness in the pit of our stomach... When we hurt with those who hurt, it hits us in the gut.

So John is calling us out because we have learned to guard our feelings; we have learned to change the channel when the pictures of hungry children appear on the screen. We have learned to turn the page when the paper is full of need and want and brokenness. "Nothing to do with me," we think to ourselves. We have shut off our

emotions; we have closed our bowels, says John. And so he rightly asks us for a gut check. Do we still care about what is going on in the world? Or has it gotten to be too much? Out of a strange sense of self-protection, we check out. There is simply too much, too much beyond our ability to help. So, instead, we simply say that it is better to take care of ourselves.

But that's not what John or God desires of us. "Let us love not in word or speech, but in truth and action." There is a call to get to work. So, we need to reassess our efforts when it comes to mission and service. We need to ask, "Is loving my neighbor just something I talk about, or it is something I do?" It's a good and important question, and one that we all need to be asking far more often. All of us could do better. John is calling for a gut check. He wants us to put our hearts into it. He wants us to abide in Christ. He wants us, out of obedience and devotion to the Lord of our lives, to let our whole lives reflect his life. It isn't something that comes halfheartedly. Christ wants all of us. Mind, heart, guts - all of us.

If we are to be the kind of people who "belong to the truth", who "set our hearts at rest in the divine presence," then we have "confidence before God" because "we keep his commands and do what pleases him." We commit ourselves to the just cause of love by obeying what God commands of us, which is both a believing and a doing. "This is God's command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another." The act of love follows from the belief, because it is only by accepting that Jesus has laid down his life for us that we realize "we *ought* to lay down our lives for our sisters and brothers." If we believe in Jesus, accept that he laid down his life for our



sake, then we have a responsibility to lay down our own lives. “Whoever claims to live in God must live as Jesus did.”

Obviously, John has our human neighbors and siblings in mind as he writes this letter. But as we reflect on our responsibility for all of creation, human and otherwise, as we reflect on all that is wrong in the world, perhaps it would be helpful to consider all areas of life and need. We can expand John’s teaching, just as God’s love and grace is extended to all of creation. When Calvin and Hobbes stumbled upon that clear-cut in the forest and imagined a housing development filling the void, they saw their animal neighbors homeless and had pity on them. Calvin sought to love them, with humorous naivety, in action and in truth.

So what needs, problems, faults, or voids do you see? How might God’s love be known in you and through you to address what is broken? There are many opportunities, depending on where your heart and passion lie. As a Church, we have partnered with the Banquet and the local food pantries to help address hunger and poverty within our area. On Saturday morning, there is going to be a community clean-up effort at Turtle Creek Park to help make our town and parks a cleaner and better place for everyone. Our noisy bucket collection each month highlights and supports various different needs. We’ve even begun the process of starting a clothing program to help collect and share second-hand clothing with families in need in our community.

As we abide in Christ, and as Christ makes us into people who live in the light and not in darkness, into people who know and don’t just feel what love is, into people who lay down our lives for others, we ought to ask ourselves: would the creatures we share this earth with describe our actions as those of Godly love? Would they describe

our lives as reflections of eternal life? Would they describe us people who lay down our lives for all creatures great and small? As we abide in Christ, how are we being shaped and challenged to love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action? How shall we live out the love and joy that we experience when abiding in Christ with our whole selves? As we each discern those answers for ourselves, let us, heart, mind, and guts, commit ourselves to be in community with one another, to be transformed by God's loving presence, and live in the love of God. Let's pray.

## **Offering**

*Doxology*

UMH 95

Offertory:

*As we enter this time of offering, I want to encourage you to consider this an expression of worship, and a means of responding to what God is doing in your life. Give out of joy, not simply because you feel an obligation to give. If you would like to support our ministry through e-giving, that is set-up on our website, and you are welcome to make use of the pew cards to still participate in the passing of the offering plate. Thank you in advance for your generosity, and I thank you for the other expressions of generosity you share outside of your finances, such as your time, your energy, and acts of service.*

## **\*Hymn**

*Blessed Be Your Name*

## **Announcements and Next Steps**

-As I mentioned in my message, there is a community clean-up event at Turtle Creek Park on Saturday at 10:00 am. It would be a great demonstration of our love for God and our neighbor if a good number of our Church could be there to help.

-Our final WILD Wednesday program will be on May 1st! We are planning on taking our 4th to 12th grade students to Thunder Road, with an anticipated cost of \$15.

-We are signed up to serve dinner at the Banquet alongside St. Ann's Catholic Church on Tuesday, May 14th! Sign-ups will be available soon.

## **\*Benediction**