Christ United Methodist Church

Sermons on the web

Deuteronomy 6: 1 - 25

1 John 4: 7 - 21

Living History

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I share with you a poem by William Stafford.

It is titled: *Ask Me*.

Some time when the river is ice ask me

Mistakes I have made. Ask me whether

What I have done is my life. Others

Have come in their slow way into

My thought, and some have tried to help

Or to hurt: ask me what difference

Their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.

You and I can turn and look

At the silent river and wait. We know

The current is there, hidden; and there

Are comings and goings from miles away

That hold the stillness exactly before us.

What the river says, that is what I say.

The poet calls to us with this question:

"Ask me whether what I have done is my life."

It seems to me that Stafford speaks the question that grounds our discipleship journey, day by day.

"Ask me whether what I have done is my life."

We come to this church because of many reasons.

One of the reasons I hope you come to church is that we unpack and lay before our God and each other core questions that are provocative enough and expansive enough to lead us to life.

We are concluding a five week time of looking into the issue of immigration - both as it is portrayed in scripture and as it is breaking our hearts and challenging our sense of hope in the year 2019.

We have read together a book by Karen Gonzalez: "The God Who Sees". In her last chapter she brings a reminder that Jesus, the heart of God made flesh in our midst - Jesus was a refugee whose family had to flee their home in order to provide for him a future.

The story of our faith as told in scripture over and over is the story of a people displaced by ecological disaster and power run amok and fear of outsiders stoked by the powerful.

This story of refugees and immigrants is our faith story.

So how are we to live today when clearly we can't seem to learn the lessons our history seeks to teach?

We turn to a core text.

The Shema - the portion of Deuteronomy read earlier - is prayed by observant Jews every morning and every evening.

“Shema means 'to judge oneself'. Prayer allows Jews to look deep within themselves at their role in the universe and their relationship with God. The most important prayer is the Shema .”(Wikipedia)

The Shema is these words, spoken over and over twice daily to remind the faithful of this core truth:

“Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heat, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6: 4 - 9)

To live as one who seeks to follow the teachings of the Rabbi Jesus, we are instructed to hear and to remember that our love relationship with God is so primary in our lives that our home is built upon it, our children know it - because we talk about it! - and our neighbors know it.

We are called to live our love relationship with God in such a way that it grounds our lives and we are called to live our love relationship with God in such a way that it shows.

“Ask me whether what I have done is my life.”

The reading from 1st John picks up the power and longing and difficulty of the lived prayer of the Shema.

“Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God.

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

We love because God first loved us.

Those who say I love God and hate their brothers or sisters are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whose they have not seen.

The commandment we have from God is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” (1 John 4, selections)

A lawyer, tested Jesus, asking: who is my neighbor? Who is my brother or sister?

Jesus’ response to the lawyer as he told the story of the Good Samaritan and Jesus response to

the question as he lived it day by day with his disciples?

Everyone. All people created by God are your brothers and your sisters.

So what are we to do, beloveds?

What are we to do about loving all people when the needs near at hand are so great and the needs at our border are so daunting and the truth is so hard to parse?

We are called to pray. We are called morning and night to ask God for the courage it takes to love.

One of the gifts of my ministry is teaching confirmation. Sam and I meet with the parents and youth together and then the youth peel off with Sam for time together and I get time with the adults to discuss how it is with their souls and how it is living love with their teenagers and their God.

This week one of the activities we did was to create a reminder card.

We asked the youth and their parents to write a phrase or a reminder they could put on their bathroom mirror to help them pray something like the Shema -

God is God - we don't have to be.

God leans toward us with love.

God desires relationship and room in our lives and hearts and we are called to love God and live God's love in such a way that our whole lives are and act of worship.

So they created those love notes from God. (And of course they put them on their bathroom mirrors, right?)

And, we asked them to write a card to read to themselves at the end of their day, right before they go to bed.

Some kind of written reminder prayer that God is with them and they are blessed by a day in which mistakes were made and forgiveness given and God remains with them. Always.

In essence, the Confirmands and their parents were asked to bind those words as a sign that their love relationship with God is ongoing, everlasting, alive and life giving.

Prayer has the power to ground us and enSpirit us and it has the power to save us.

The second thing we can do when the needs of our brothers and sisters feel so immense?

We can practice our faith in the place where we are.

God has put you in the place where you are most urgently needed to witness to love.

The picture above is love in action.

In 2018 the Jordon Football Association Final Women's League game was being played.

A woman from Amman Club was on the field and her hijab began to slip, exposing her hair, which is covered by some observant Muslims as a way to maintain modesty and privacy.

Immediately, upon seeing the issue, players from the opposing team - during this finals game - stopped what they were doing and surrounded their human sister in order that she could adjust her hijab out of public gaze. Her opponents made a human shield.

As soon as the player got up, the two teams went back to competing.

That picture stands as witness.

Wherever you are, there is love to be lived, there is kindness to practice.

The poet William Stafford uses the metaphor of a frozen river to reflect upon the question:

"Ask me whether what I have done is my life."

The river that is our life changes based on the seasons of our lives, no?

Sometimes our lives feel fluid and energy-charged and forcefully moving toward communion with all that is. And sometimes our lives feel frozen and turgid.

What scripture teaches us is that throughout our lives, no matter the state or stage of our lives, the current of God's presence and love and desire for our healing and wholeness and capacity to love is moving. God is ALWAY moving.

Hear oh Israel, the Lord is our God.

God is love.

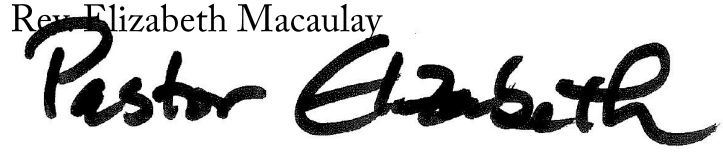
Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

As we do the work of living our love of God, I invite us all:

To pray.

To practice love diligently, imperfectly, and courageously.

The world has need of you and your lived love.

Amen

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