

## Reaching Out Through Love ~ May 17, 2009

Acts 10:44-48; I John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17; Psalm 98

It seems that, during this season on the church calendar, the readings turn to thoughts of love. This might be because it is Spring, but I don't think so. Instead, this is a mellowing time following the days of the march to the cross, the pain of the crucifixion, the frightening joy of the resurrection. It is a time to pause and discover, just as those early disciples must have, just what the message and meaning of Jesus was all about. It is a time when, in calmness and serenity, we can consider how the most basic of his teachings can be lived by us and shown to others.

The coming of new life all around us should cause us to reflect on how it is we fit into the broader picture. How is it we can make our lives new again? This is very difficult for most of us because in our rush through life we often miss the cycles of life and nature that occur right under our noses. Suddenly, it seems, our lives have sped by at an incredible pace and we have little time to do all we really had hoped to accomplish. We have neglected to live in the present moment fully aware of what is happening in that instant. Too often we focus on what will be in a few hours, a few days, a few months. In this way we lose our precious lives. We never see what is going on around us.

Few of us stop to take a closer look at the dandelions springing up. We only see them as pesky weeds that need to be annihilated. We don't always hear the sweetness of the birdsong that heralds each new day or the scolding of a little red squirrel as it tries to claim sunflower seeds in a feeder meant for birds only. Have you seen the trillium along the dirt roads? Or, the jack-in-the-pulpit? Or what we Midwesterners call "marsh marigolds?" Or, all those violets in the lawn? And have you allowed yourselves time to smell the lilacs?

This is the season, in spite of all our allergies, of wonderful renewal. It is time to ponder in a measured, level-headed, open way what it is that lies before us. It is a time for love to become more perfected in us and reflected through us. It is the time to consciously hear and heed the most central of the commandments of Christ—that we love one another.

That's what began to happen when Peter had finished speaking. When those Jewish followers of Jesus had their eyes and hearts opened to those Gentiles standing beside them listening with rapt attention to what it was Peter was saying. They were inspired by his words and touched by the Holy Spirit. What astonishment those Jewish followers felt when they discovered that, even **those people, those Gentiles**, were to be included in the good news of Christ. They believed that the message and the grace it brought were only for those who were Jews.

But, here was a turning point, the message was and is for all those who can hear it. There was to be no litmus test to determine who was in and who was out. Instead, the good news was for all those—Jew and Gentile alike—who found delight, peace, love and strength in this new way of doing religion. The message was meant to be one of inclusion, never exclusion. Jesus did not reject those who wanted to follow him, no matter who they were or where they were in life. He was rejected by those who could not

and would not hear and understand and who were fearful that he might change the order of things and upset their well structured world.

They did not understand what reaching out in love could do and so they lost what it could have brought to them through their need to maintain power and control. Love can be a sloppy thing—it often leads to kindness, gentleness, openness and understanding. It softens us and lets others have a chance at life.

We often do not remember the wonderful power of love. We forget that it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, it is patient, kind, it never seeks to judge another person. It never ends. We brush love aside and turn to our safe daily “to do lists” and the orderly life they seem to bring us.

Perhaps, if we paused between each of those things we feel we must do to look around ourselves and rediscover ourselves in the present moment, we might enrich our lives beyond measure. Just as the early followers enriched theirs through recognizing kindred spirits they never knew existed.

There is a small bird feeder that is attached to a window in the parsonage study. When people stop by to visit they are often distracted by the activity that goes on behind me. They set aside their focus to watch the evening or rose-breasted grosbeaks, the chickadee-dee-dee-dees, the variety of finches, the cardinals that often peek curiously into the window, the little woodpeckers, and the naughty, naughty, naughty red squirrels. In the few minutes my visitors consider the birds and beasties so busy with life, their demeanor changes and there is delight and a love of nature revealed to them and me. Of course, this is only for a moment or two, but it happens. There is a break in the rush through life, a touch of being in the present and not being concerned with what might happen next in life.

Wouldn't it be better for all of us to entertain more of these unscripted moments? Wouldn't it be better for us to take off our blinders and open ourselves to the beauty of this world and of one another? When we are able to let the wonder of life and love in, we are enabled to send the wonder of life and love out.

Isn't that what Jesus was telling all who would listen? Remember those words written by the author of the Gospel of John: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.....I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

For our joy to be complete, we need to become the present-day channels of God's love to the world. It is our turn to practice the art of reaching out in that love.

*-- Amen*