

LOL

Psalm 19: 7 – 14, Matthew 21: 33 – 46

Let us pray. O God of our peace, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable and pleasing in your sight, O God, our source, our savior, and our sustainer. Amen.

Three Sundays ago my daughter texted me during the Browns game. I sent the text on to a friend who was at the game. The text said that the Indians had lost fewer games in the last five weeks than the Browns had won in the last five years. (The Indians have also outscored the Browns on several occasions). My friend texted back: LOL. In texting jargon that means laugh out loud. For us, LOL should also mean love out loud. Several years ago that was the theme of a mission trip I went on: Love out loud. That's what we get to do as church, love out loud; apply the love of Jesus to the world.

As we have said before, we are not the body of Christ in a poetic sense. The body of Christ is not a metaphor. It is what we are. Ours are the hearts through which he loves the world. Ours are the hands through which he touches the world. Ours are the arms through which he carries the world. Christ has no other body than ours with which to respond to the needs of the world.

I know I sound like a broken record, but the news repeats itself day to day, week to week, year to year. The bad news of our times is the broken record. It seems that the world needs the love of Christ now more than ever. I am sure folks said that with disasters and storms past. But we are Christ's body in the present. We are his response now. We apply his love to the world around us now.

Love is a conscious act, a purposeful act. As church we practice planned acts of kindness, planned acts of love. UMCOR has raised 8 million dollars and counting for hurricane relief. Today we walk in our annual crop walk for those who hunger. Those are planned acts of kindness, purposeful responses to the needs of our neighbors, the application of Christ's love as his body.

Therese of Lisieux, a 19th century nun, who wrote the Little Way, reminding us that we find God in all we do moment by moment, taught that love is a conscious act. She said she understood that only through love do we please our Lord. On the other hand, violence is an unconscious act. Violence is ignorant; we slip into an unconscious act, being unaware of what we are doing, having lost our mind, not knowing what we do – haven't you felt that whenever you have been angry? That you weren't yourself, that you lost control? That sheds light on the words of Jesus upon the cross: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.' But when we love, we know exactly what we are doing. When we love we are in our right minds, or at least if we've lost our minds, we've assumed the loving mind of Christ!

Psalm 19 says that the law of the Lord revives the soul, that the commands of the Lord enlighten us. They are our true riches, more desired than gold. Jesus tells us that all the law and the prophets, all the commandments of God, hang on love, depend upon the love of God and neighbor alike. Paul says that love fulfills the law. Paul also urges us to assume the mind of

Christ, assuming his humility, his love, his care. As his church we are his caretakers. We care for his kin. We respond to the needs of the world, applying our faith, applying his love.

The parable of the wicked tenants tells a story that could be on the news today. If we break the characters down, we can see that the slaves are the prophets, being rejected generation after generation by Israel. The son is Christ, also rejected, scorned, and killed. In scripture the vineyard represents Israel. The vineyard though could be any entity today, a family, a church, our nation, the world. At its core, the parable tells us that we are caretakers of God's creation. The tenants did not take care of what God entrusted to them. God warns them that he will find more suitable tenants, tenants who will produce fruits for the kingdom of God. As the body of Christ, we find ourselves as tenants of the vineyard, as caretakers, responding to the bad news of the world with the good news of Jesus.

And that's what we get to do, respond, be his hands and feet, his heart and voice. At times though we find ourselves as the ones in need of response, in need of care, in need of assurance as we endure the bad news of the day, the latest storm, the latest shooting, our own latest loss, the bad news unfolding in our midst, breaking our hearts, making us wonder what the world's coming to. At times we feel like the beaten slaves God sends to fetch the fruit. We love so much that it hurts that much more. At times our sorrow makes us lose our minds!

I pray that at those times, at times such as these, we know that the Lord's law, the Lord's love, does indeed revive the soul, does indeed rejoice the heart, does indeed enlighten us, shining his light upon us, casting out our darkness.

As Christ's body we minister to the needs of the world, we respond, we apply his love to our neighbors. Though sometimes we may sound as if our neighbors are only those far away, are only those outside our church walls. Sometimes we forget the neighbor in the pew next to us needs prayer, needs assurance, needs solace and comfort. Sometimes we take their joy for granted. Sometimes we need to minister within to minister without. That's true as individuals and true as church. At times we need to sit by the brook of the word and find solace. At times we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and let him love us, let him tend to his body that it may tend to the needs of the world.

So let Jesus love you. Let his love cascade over you, pour over you. In the midst of your trials, of our nation's trials, be more aware than ever of his love for you.

Psalm 19 concludes with the prayer many preachers use before their sermon. Many preachers say it just like it is, using the singular 'meditation of my heart.' Many preachers make that plural, saying 'the mediations of our hearts,' for ministry is a two-way street. We are all in this together. We hear the word together. We respond together to the bad news of the day with the good news of Jesus Christ. We all meditate on the best way to apply the love of Christ together. And that includes our own needs.

Be more aware than ever that his love embraces you through your faith family, through your fellow tenants. Be more aware than ever that he loves you out loud through the heart of the neighbors next to you now, through your brothers and sisters in faith, through the body of Christ that surrounds you, that prays with you, that worships with you, that responds to the needs of the world with you...be more aware than ever that Jesus loves you out loud through

your faith family, that while your church applies the love of Christ to neighbors near and far, your church also applies that love to you now, to you in your need.

We are tenants of God's kingdom, producing fruit together, moment by moment, sharing the mind of Christ by consciously planning acts of love, acts of kindness, it always being the right time to love out loud, always being the right time to apply the love of Christ to the needs of the world, always being the right time to offer the comfort of Christ, to be a good tenant inside and outside these hallowed walls, together being the hands and feet, the heart and voice of the greatest love ever to walk this earth, sharing his good news...for the sake of the world that God so loves and for the sake of each brother and sister of our faith home. Amen.