

Monday, October 5 *Linda Marx*

We, as Christians, are commanded to love. We are challenged to love. Love thy neighbor! Love your enemies! Whatever you do, LOVE. Throughout the Gospel, we read the many acts of love by Jesus, and some of us are amazed! And then there's the early church in Corinth! (We may have more in common with them than we want to admit!) In the early days, they really struggled. Their actions were self-centered. Their concern was for status. What a dysfunctional mess! The Apostle Paul steps in (by letter) to advise them, to tell them of the community function of love. Perhaps love is the glue. He writes:

*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him.
~1 Corinthians 8:1-2*



And then there is the reminder that it is not about us as individuals:

All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build us up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other. ~1 Corinthians 10:23-24

Love is the proper care and consideration of others. Love is an essential ingredient of life; it builds us up. Then, Paul encourages us to strive "for the greater gifts" and he shows us a "more excellent way". And so he writes the love chapter! How often do we read it? Can we really live it?

Let's read it now:

Love

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not selfseeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. ~1 Corinthians 13

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Love is a “thing”. It can be a verb. It is an attitude. It is a behavior. It is quite the challenge! We fall short. We do not love as we have been commanded to do. We struggle to love people who don’t think the way we want them to think. We struggle to love those who don’t live their lives the way we think they should live. We struggle. Unfortunately, Paul gives us no exceptions to the rule. He gives us no reason to withhold love. He reminds us of the importance of love to our community, and to the world. He schools us on that fact that God does not withhold his love from us! and so we continue to struggle....to love.

Paul’s parting advice to us:

Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.

As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of our beloved church, let us go forth in love. Build us up.

Heavenly Father, help us to love others as you have loved us! Amen.

Tuesday, October 6 *Rachel McWhirter*

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight; In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ~Proverbs 3:5-6

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. ~Isaiah 43:19



No one who has experienced the year 2020 has escaped the uncertainty of change. This year has been the equivalent of rapidly approaching a freeway interchange while the dreaded “recalculating” phrase is repeated by the driver assist voice – yet no clear route has been determined. Changes in life’s plans may be unexpected, uncomfortable, and even unwanted at times, but change is necessary and divinely built into the fabric of our existence. Changing plans is often the better part of wisdom and God may intervene to put us on another path. We see this clearly illustrated in the Bible many times – but the example of Saint Paul has been highly relatable to me this year.

During his second journey as a missionary, Paul (accompanied by Silas) intended to revisit the formative churches in the Asia Minor provinces with the purpose of starting new ones, “but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them” (Acts 16:7). All doors were closed, God had other plans. At Troas, Paul had a vision of a man asking him to “come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). Thus, they left Asia Minor to become the very first Christian missionaries in Europe.

Paul also didn’t originally plan to minister to the Galatians. He was sidetracked by illness (can’t we all relate?) Nevertheless, God utilized Paul to plant a church! Paul lived among the Galatians, learned of their culture, and he loved them. While he preached the Gospel, he figured out how to communicate Christ in a way that was relatable to these people. The relationships he cultivated were crucial in this understanding. When Paul says, “become like me, for I became like you”, (Galatians 4:12) he encourages them to follow his example of what faithfulness is. Paul serves as a reminder that often the best way to communicate Christ’s Gospel of grace and love is to live and communicate in relationship with others.

The COVID-19 pandemic seemingly took many things from me – a career, the lives of loved ones, a sense of stability I enjoyed. I am not alone in this experience. However, it never took away my faith that God’s changes in my worldly plans would be far greater and reaching than I could understand. As a newly accepted member at Christ the King (and new Lutheran to boot), I never expected to be so quickly called away from the path I had created for my own life to help the church during a global crisis. Instead of reeling against the changes hitting me like constant tsunamis, I fell to my knees in gratitude for all I had lost more than once – thankful to have been included in finding new ways to help ‘plant the church’ digitally in spite of everything else happening around me. This new virtual frontier is an untamed ministry full of challenges, but I feel so fortunate to be surrounded by a congregation steeped in love for our neighbors and guided by leadership that didn’t hesitate to make a way for the Word to be accessible to all of God’s people – wherever they may be in the world.

Sometimes, we just have to start over – and over, and over once again, seeking God to help us to find the right path as we regroup. Amid all the changes in our world and in our lives, there is one constant:

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Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). His Word abides. His saving love is the same now as it was when He took up the cross and laid down His life for our salvation. Sometimes when you're stuck 'recalculating' you literally have to let Jesus take the wheel as the starting point to reroute your life. What changes are you facing today? What changes are you putting off, pushing up against, or even running from? How would your life and your relationship with God look differently by yielding to change?

Gracious, merciful, and steadfast God, we know that change in our lives is inevitable, but we are afraid. Your son, Jesus Christ, came into the world as one of us and suffered as we do. Where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and openness. Where anxiety and illness are infectious and widening, grant healing and reassurance. Where impossibilities seem to block every door and window, grant creativity and resilience. Where the dark twists our thinking, grant peace and illumination. Where spirits are weary and weakened, grant reimagined dreams and sources of hope. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Wednesday, October 7

Lisa Miller

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go. O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea. ~Isaiah 48:17-18



This was God's remonstrance to Israel, His chosen people: Had they walked with Him and trusted Him from the start, their lot would have been very different and they would now be experiencing far greater blessings. This should be a no-brainer, but it seems that Jesus' moral principles are simple, the application difficult: "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27); "always treat others as you would like them to treat you" (Matthew 7:12); and "forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37).

"How can I do better?" I'm always asking myself. "Why should this walk be so difficult?" Looking for an answer, reflecting on my own life-journey, it feels like the words of a popular song from my misspent youth, "What a long, strange trip it's been!"

That journey has at times taken me — a Lutheran transgender woman — in contact with perhaps well-intentioned people, who, using any of a half-dozen scriptural "clobber" passages taken from eisegesis, demonstrate that somehow I've made a "choice" that has strayed from walking with God. God hates me, they tell me. But why? What have I done?

At other times my life-journey has taken me to less well-intentioned people, who see my gender identity as a disease, who try to legislate me out of existence. They want to make me a felon for using a public restroom. They tell medical professionals to use their own moral judgment about whether they should treat me or not. God hates me, they imply.

It's sometimes difficult, at least for me, to discern the right path when one is steadily fed misleading information!

Am I mistaken? Am I enough? Will my enemies destroy me? Do I have the stamina to see this through? Doubts are constantly swirling through my head. Yet the person who fails to trust God's Word completely forfeits more than comfort. She forfeits peace.

These times inevitably lead me, like Jacob, to a point where I'm wrestling with God. Even when I realize that I'm fighting God, I still have to struggle with Him in prayer; I still have to get Him into the center of my life. That takes grappling in prayer, that takes introspection, very often I've felt like my heart's dead! I hold up the Law, I hold up the Commandments: "You must live up to this standard!" my heart tells me! And being the Law, I'm terrorized, and being terrorized — feeling insufficient — finally, once I despair of my own ability, then I hear the gospel. I hear the good news! Christ has paid it all!! I simply have to believe that His justification is sufficient, even for right now, even for the moment that I feel terrorized by the Law.

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The Christian life is a reapplication of the doctrine of justification again and again and again! “If only you had trusted Him from the start, how very different your lot would be!”

This is what Christ the King Church does for me. It gives me a chance to unfold, to be myself — a healing place where I can love God and others as myself, treat them as I want to be treated, and to forgive and be forgiven.

Father, thank you for caring about our pain and disappointments. Calm the whirling winds of fear and hurt that threaten our faith. Keep us from trying to cope with our struggles by our own strength and willpower. Help us to release our emotions to you and trust you to sustain us. Thank you for your comforting words of wisdom. Let us receive the healing of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thursday, October 8 *Marie Monroe*

And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ~Genesis 15:5

*Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.
~Genesis 17:4*

"Now we are all part of that Great Family, which has become as many as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand in the desert."

These words come near the end of the Godly Play story, The Great Family, which tells the story of Abraham and Sarah's travels and the promise made several times that he will be the father of a great nation, whose members are more than stars in the heavens. God also reassures Sarah that she will have a baby by the end of the year, though she is 90 years old.

We start this Sunday School year with this story and its promises. This story is a favorite with the children, coming at the beginning of the year and involving wooden characters moved slowly across the sand in a "desert box," a large sand box. God keeps telling Abram, at first, and Abraham later that he will be the father of a family. We tell the children that God told him that "the members of the Great Family will be as many as there are stars in the sky and grains of sand in the desert." And what did Abram do? He laughed. Just as Sarah laughed later when she overheard strangers telling Abraham that they would have a son. She was 90 and he was 99! So she laughed so hard. And then do you know what happened? Abraham and Sarah had a son and they named him "Laughter" which in their language was "Isaac."

This is a good story to have during a pandemic. It's full of promise and reassurance. And the best promise is that they are not alone, not at all. Even though they are beyond the age when they could expect a child, God keeps reminding them "you will be part of a great family." Families are exactly what we need now — someone to carry on our stories, laugh with us, make faces behind their masks, remind us that we are not alone. God promises us that things will not remain like they are now. So we, like Abraham and Sarah, can laugh even though we are away from our friends, scared of getting sick, and wondering what next? They laughed and so do we.

What a relief to know that now we are all part of that Great Family.

Dear Lord, Teach us that all of your children are our brothers or sisters. Make us joyful at the strength we have, joined together as the body of Christ. Amen.



Friday, October 9

Linda Murray

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ~Psalm 103:8

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ~Jeremiah 29:11

You might wonder why these two seemingly unrelated bible verses were chosen together, so let me explain with a few background stories.

As a full-time working single parent adopter of three foreign-born older children (ages 6, 13 and 13 at the time of their respective adoptions, all many years ago), these two verses are now very much beloved in our family.

Faith, patience, love and hope are some of the key ingredients for successful family life.

When my children first arrived into the US, they had limited English and were very used to experiencing adults or caregivers who had failed them. As a result, all three of them would constantly test their boundary limits, in order to see if I, as their new parent and caregiver, was also going to fail them by harming them or sending them away.

During their first year in the US, the youngest was clumsy and many times didn't even try to anger me on purpose, while the teens made it their mission. This was infuriating to me, could they not see how lucky they were now? Hmmm, time to stop for reflection!

The six-year-old had once dumped a full saltshaker out onto the living room floor, and the teens dropped a bag of flour, plus dumped out the coffee grounds all over the kitchen floor. Both spills created dangerous situations, especially when you also have a houseful of pets that could become very sick getting into those spills, making me very mad.

As we swept and cleaned up those messes, I struggled to stifle my growing anger, especially when they would instead make the mess worse by not really helping to clean up. As usual, I was only partly successful in stifling my anger.

In reality, as mild as my children's transgressions were in the grand scheme of things, you'd think that I would have been able to laugh it off. To instead make it a teachable moment. Sadly, I would often instead give in to anger. Especially if that "spill" occurred after a long frustrating day at work, I was only partly successful in stifling my anger and keeping things in perspective. In my anger and frustration, I was lacking the grace that my children needed to be demonstrated to them in those moments.

When we consider the depth of human imperfection and the scope of human evil, how remarkable it is to then discover that, unlike us, God is **"gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love"**.



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In my fits of anger, I had to try to really remind myself of our Lord's grace, and then in turn, to try to display and model that same behavior of love towards my children. Knowing that children who've never previously known the love of an earthly parent will also struggle to understand the depth of love that our Heavenly Father has for us, it was critical for me to model a behavior of grace rather than of anger.

So the action step, for us all in this story, is to be aware of what sparks anger in you, and to try to remember God's steadfast love, by praying to our gracious God: "to please help us to be slow to anger and abiding in love towards others as God is toward us. Amen.

As the children began to understand this, and as we all tried to model that behavior of grace towards each other, then the second verse, as quoted above from Jeremiah 29:11, also became our family "theme verse".

Over time, the children began to feel my love and see that they were now residing in a safe place, and that no matter their undesirable behavior, they were still very much loved and that this was their home. They gave their hearts over to our Lord, and began to prosper. Over time they understood what it meant to be a child adopted not just by me, but by God. As believers, we are all God's adopted children. We are part of God's family, not just our small family unit, but a part of a bigger family community.

My children began to learn and grow, plus see their new future here in America within a positive light, in this new loving forever-home environment, strengthened with the knowledge that God indeed does have a plan for each one of them individually, to prosper them and to give them "hope and a future".

Those two bible verses, plus this prayer, "A Family Blessing", are posted on the refrigerator as visual reminders.

A Family Blessing

Lord of all, Bless our families. Be they formed by blood or by circumstance, make them holy. Lord, may we find you in our relationships, in our families, in our households, in our communities, in our church families, in our workplaces, and in our collective global humanity. May we look across all that divides us and see one true family. Families that come in all shapes, sizes and colors. We are basically all one human species. Let us celebrate any perceived differences harmoniously. Let us embrace each other as a family does. Let us love each other as a family ought to do. For where there are two or three gathered together in your name Lord, there, the Spirit is present and God is with us. Amen.

Thanks be to God!

Especially in these crazy days, when we are all "together, while apart" during this time of quarantine, these two bible verses, plus this prayer, helps to remind ourselves to continue to love one another and to have hope for the future.

Saturday, October 10 *Naomi Nelson*

*He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of
the living God." ~Matthew 16:15-16*

Last fall, our church group embarked on a Holy Land tour designed to visit areas of Jesus' life and ministry. But to my surprise one of the first sites we visited was an ancient pagan attraction – temple ruins once built to honor the Greek god Pan. Sitting below the cool waterfall that flows into the Jordan River, we learned that here, near Caesarea Philippi, the disciples were confronted with pressing questions about the identity of Jesus.

In this idolatrous area, Jesus asked his faithful disciples "Who do you say that I am?" This open-ended question was a typical teaching style of Jesus; such questions required answers of deep personal reflection. A closed-ended question with a yes or no response may have been sufficient, but Jesus wanted more. Peter responded with an answer that professed his personal beliefs – "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."



That powerful question to the disciples became real for me that morning and has challenged me ever since. My answer to the question "Who do you say that I am" waxes and wanes depending on my mood, my spiritual needs, and life's circumstances. Sometimes my answers seem speculative because of my own doubts, hesitations, and questions. At other times, I feel that my answer is solid and unmoving like the rocky grotto. I find the identity question important but difficult because Peter's answer suggests much more than it appears. The answer has deeper implications – it not only identifies who Jesus is, but because of that identity demands actions of trust and commitment.

God is working through faithful persons on our Church Council, ministry, music, and support staffs to enrich our loving community, and to provide worship and service opportunities that strengthen each of us in our journey of faith. There is encouragement at our church for asking questions and contemplating answers as we discern together not only who Jesus is but who are we once we have pondered that question.

Far from the fixed rocks of the ancient ruins and the freshness of mountain water, Jesus continues to confront us with the stirring question "Who do you say that I am?" I think it's perfectly legitimate to 'borrow' the answer from Peter and to proclaim "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Let us stand with the witness of Peter and the disciples as we celebrate the 75 years of blessings on Christ the King Lutheran Church. **Thanks be to God.**

Sunday, October 11 *Alice Oeben*

But Jesus said, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." ~Matthew 19:14

When I was a very little girl, the first song I learned in Sunday school was "Jesus Loves Me." The words were simple, repetitive and easy for young children to learn. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong; they are weak but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so."

Another song we were taught as a companion to this was:

"Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." The word, "black," in this song was the only time I heard it used to refer to those we knew as "colored people."

I was born in North Carolina and went to school there until we moved to the southern part of Virginia. We lived in an old house, Shady Grove, which had been built in the early 1800's. It was the home of Spotswood Henry built on land which had been given to him by his father, Patrick Henry. The house was built of plantation bricks made from the red clay soil of the area. Regrettably, but most certainly, slaves were used to make the bricks and to build the house. I returned to North Carolina to go to college, studying nursing. When I graduated, I had never attended an integrated school. Integration took place the following year.

It was my patients who taught me about the feelings of black people. The hospital wards were separated and labeled "Colored Medical Patients" or "White Surgical Patients" and so forth. Public restroom doors were labeled White Women or Colored Men and so forth. Water fountains also were marked Colored or White. I will never, ever forget the little old black lady who needed to get out of her chair and walk. Her shoes were on the floor beside her and I stooped over to put her shoes on her feet. She immediately put her hands on my shoulders and tried to pull me upright. She cried out, "No, Missy! No, Missy!" She was mortified that a white girl would be putting her shoes on her feet. Another day, I was giving a bed bath to an elderly black gentleman who was weak, bedridden, and unable to do anything for himself. As nurses, we were careful to keep all patients warm and covered with towels in a way that preserved their modesty, but this man was distressed that I would be bathing him. I told him that an orderly would come in afterwards to assist him in completing his bath. Talking with him throughout helped distract him, but I think he was very relieved when I was finished and the orderly came in. These and others patients helped me greatly in understanding the feelings of black people as we all struggled with the changing social practices. May we continue the struggle to change social and justice practices and find new ways of living together in Jesus' love.

Jesus loves me, this I know. Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. The Bible tells me so.

Dear Heavenly Father, Lead us to treat one another with love and compassion as brothers and sisters in your family, called to serve the world in your holy name. Amen.

