

March 17, 2024

1 Corinthians 13:4-13

John 12:20-33

The Promise of Love is Letting Go

During this season of Lent, we examine our lives and how well we have loved God with our heart, mind and strength. How intentional have we been about loving our neighbors as ourselves? How faithful have we been to Jesus' commandment to love one another as he has loved us? Because love is what matters most. God IS love. And because of love, God promises to keep us safe just as God promised to never destroy the earth again after the flood that forced Noah to build an ark. The love of God is personal as it was with Abraham and Sarah. Who needed the blessing of family and a place to call home in order to be a blessing to others. The love of God sets boundaries as it did with the Ten Commandments so that the rules of respect are clear. And last week with Jesus and Nicodemus, we learned that the truth is love with Nicodemus; and love is the truth. Today, we learn from Jesus that love sacrifices itself. Like a seed, it surrenders itself. It gives up its own comfort and plans. It dies to own self-contained existence for the sake of something bigger. But love like this never ends.

In our reading from the gospel of John, today, we are at a very important part of the story. Jesus' time has come. He tells his disciples that now is the time for him to be glorified. Andrew and Philip have just told Jesus that there are some Greek people who wish to see him. And Jesus responds by saying that now his hour has come. And it seems like the Greeks have somehow triggered it. He doesn't really explain what he means. But that's how Jesus is in the gospel of John. Jesus speaks about divine mysteries, and no one understands. It's like he is speaking another language of spiritual truth and others don't get it. He sees the fulfillment of age-old prophecies. But his disciples, they just see Greek tourists who want to talk to him.

The Greeks have come to Jesus during the festival of the Passover. It is the celebration of God delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

And the atmosphere in Jerusalem is full of energy and expectation.

People are waiting and hoping and wanting God to deliver them again from Roman tyranny and from the pain and suffering around them. There is an energy moving throughout them. Jesus feels it; the Spirit is blowing where it will. There are sheep listening for the voice of their shepherd.

And the Greeks, Gentiles, have come to him. It is a sign. As it was said long ago that the nations would come to God. Gentiles turn to the Lord. It's time for God to do what God will do.

Jesus knows the hour has come. The end is near. His end. And he knows this is the reason he has come. here. Imagine being on the edge of that big moment. Imagine the feelings on the day of the big test, or the playoff game, or the meeting with the boss. Imagine it's your wedding day, or the day your baby is coming, or the surgery is taking place.

Imagine it's time. It's now or never. There is no turning back. All you can do now is embrace it.

It's time for Jesus. He knows it. He will be lifted up on the cross, and it will draw all people to him. This Bible we have is written in another language and we are always finding the best way to understand it. The New Testament was written in Greek and the Greek word for DRAW is hell-COO-oh and it means to attract or pull. Like a net dragging fish in from the sea. Jesus' death will get people's attention. It will draw people in like a magnet. The weight of it all, of God's own Son giving his life

for the life of the world will be so great and so strong, that it will tilt the world toward God.

Jesus tells his disciples that everything is about to shift. The tide is going to turn. He tells them that unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it will bear much fruit. He tells his disciples these things, but it's like he is telling himself these things too. He is reassuring himself that this is what must happen. This is how God will love the world and how Jesus must love it too. He cannot keep his life to himself. A seed is only a seed. Unless it dies. Unless it lays down its life. Then it becomes something much greater.

Jesus must give his own life to give life back to the world. He must surrender to any other future or any other possible plan or any other way out. He must die to himself. If the world is going to change. If darkness and despair are to be defeated. If God is to rescue us from slavery again then Jesus must enter into death himself and turn the tables. He must believe his sacrifice will give life to others.

Love does not keep its life for itself. When the time comes, love gives its life for others. Maximillian Kolbe was born in 1894 in Poland. He had

always been a religious boy and in 1918, he became a Catholic priest.

World War I and the rise of Hitler were difficult times. But Father Kolbe stayed true to his calling. In 1941, he was arrested by the Nazis for helping Jews in Warsaw, Poland. He was taken to Auschwitz prison camp. A few months after he arrived, one of the prisoners escaped from the camp. As a way to deter anyone from planning future escapes, the Nazi camp commander decided that ten prisoners would be starved to death. As the ten men were being chosen, one of the men began crying, “My wife, my children!” Father Kolbe, who had no wife or children, volunteered to take the prisoner’s place. And died after two weeks with no food or water.

Father Kolbe was ready to give his life. He was prepared to do whatever love required. Even if it meant making the greatest sacrifice of all. Now you and I may never face a situation like Father Kolbe. But we are called to love as Jesus loved too. We are called, as his disciples, to give our lives for others. To make sacrifices in whatever ways are available to us. We can check on a neighbor. Pick up dinner for the parent of a new baby. Call that friend you haven’t talked to in a while. Stand up for the

kid who gets picked on. Forgive someone for a mistake. Come clean the church on a Saturday. Be a mentor in a homework club. Help single moms get back on their feet. Support young men coming out of addiction. Give someone a lift. Give someone a break. Give someone the benefit of the doubt. Give someone your undivided time and attention. Give someone your prayers. This is what the self-giving love of Jesus looks like. When we let go of our single solitary lives, lived only for ourselves. And we surrender to a greater life. We give ourselves to a greater love. Seeds are scattered. They take root in others and grow. They bear fruit beyond us, in ways we can't see.

The time will come for us to do what is required of love. Just as the time came for Jesus. He had to practice what he preached. He had to be faithful, so that the world could have faith again. So it could be set free. He surrendered himself and his own needs for happiness and safety and peaceful existence. He will set aside his own ideas and plans and desires. He let go of what he wanted and entrusted himself to God. Through all the suffering and sorrow that was to come. Through pain and death. He emptied himself. He gave all of himself. Because this is what God's love

is at its heart. It is not buried in itself. It is buried in the world, a seed, waiting to spring up with new life with a harvest for others.

The apostle Paul tells us love does not live for itself. It lives for others.

And everything else besides love will come to an end. Prophecies will come to an end. Knowledge will come to an end. Our special abilities, our wisdom, our politics, our power. They will all come to an end. But love never ends. Because love is from God. And in the end, love is all that matters. So go ahead and let go of everything else. And hold on to God. Hold on grace and mercy. Hold on to eternal life. And let go of that smaller life of yours. Lose your life, and you will find it. Give your life to God and know that God will give life back to you. Bury yourself like a seed in God's divine goodness. And know that it will bear a great harvest. After you. Beyond you. Nothing will be wasted and nothing will be lost. As Jesus is lifted up and he lays down his life, the world is changed. As he gives himself, Jesus draws all people to himself. And his love is enough. God's love is enough to hold us. If we are willing to let it, and let go.