

Redeem Love
 February 3, 2019
 Mark Moline Sermon

Jesus Loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so.....Today we have St. Paul's writing at its very best: "Faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." Paul knew Christ's command, "Love one another just as I have loved you." These are not isolated verses and this is no obscure point. Jesus loves us, and I think, that's the principle theme of our faith. The Great Commission reads, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." What did Jesus command, "Love one another as I have loved you."

God is love, and that theme runs persistently throughout all of Holy Scripture. But, what do we do with all of this Godly love now that we've received it. How do we receive it, how do we live it out, how do we go about loving God in return?

Of course there is no such thing as forced love. This is a commandment yes, but we have a free will and humankind has been rejecting God's commandments since Adam and Eve. Real love must be freely given and welcomed and freely received and then returned. So what is our part? Our Epistle reading answers that question --Simply put - *We love God by loving one another.* Loving one another is our primary means of receiving God's love and showing that we welcome and appreciate it. It's how we love God in return.

John writes in his first epistle, "let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and in action. " It is clear that John does not write of a sweet syrupy kind of love that is *all show*. John wants truth and action in complying with Christ's new commandment.

Most of us probably find it easy to love the people of this parish – you all know you are a very lovable congregation. Don't let that change, but I actually hope you do attract a few "difficult-to-love-folks" --- You need them and they need you. But, for now I suspect Its easy to love the people here -- The rub seems to come when we try to love that one particular person or those two or three difficult persons, probably from outside the parish, those we carry around on our own personal short list. A neighbor perhaps, co-workers or even relatives - perhaps an in-law. We can love the group, we can love others in general, but it seems we have real problems with one or two individuals.

Do you carry such a short list in your heart? I do. Chalk it up to a personality conflict, or a painful experience, or maybe it seems they just don't want our love. Some folks can make us really work at loving them, and we struggle with that.

Through belief in Christ we can sincerely love even those difficult persons. We can't force our love on them any more than God forces his love on us, but we can love them in Christ. We who believe are all triangulated with Christ in all of our relationships with others. Jesus loves us, Jesus love the other person, we love Jesus by loving the other. It is a three way relationship. You see, It's never just you and me. Christ is there in the midst of our relationships. In fact, we get

in trouble with one, or even both persons exclude Christ from the relationship. Christ is there in the midst of our love for others – even the difficult ones – I think especially the difficult ones.

This morning - For just a moment I want you to think of that person who heads up your short list of difficult people to love. With that person clearly in your mind, I have an important question for you. Can you see God in that person's life? Can you see the same person that Christ sees – that Christ loves so very much? Try real hard – for Christ was nailed to a cross just for that person.

Remember, It can be difficult, you may struggle, it can take time (that's OK – God has the time – we love a patient and forgiving God), *but* You are to love your brothers and sisters, your neighbors, you're to love the strangers, to love the unlovely, You are to even love your enemies, and that is one big order, but then we choose to serve and love a big God who is LOVE.