

## Learning To Love

So this is the assigned text today and it's not usual that I read both assigned text; both from Revelation and from The Gospel, but I thought they tied together so well, I couldn't resist bringing them together and seeing if we can make sense of them in the sermon today. So the gospel story of John, John 13, this passage should be very familiar because it was in the creed that we read weekly and it is really, if you will; it's the mission statement for Christianity. It's very simple: love one another, as I have loved you. And Jesus says "and people will know that you're my followers, for one simple reason, you love one another." That's it no complex theology, no insiders outsiders; good bad; it's just 'love one another.' That's the mission statement of all of Christianity and that is our challenge in our lives. It's also interesting that He says it in the context that Judas, His Treasurer and disciple, has just left to betray Him and He's having a conversation with Peter who is about to deny Him. So it's interesting in that context, that He's talking about: love one another, even though I know that even in this room I will face evil, betrayal and denial. It's not a pie-in-the-sky, love one another; it's a love one another based in real challenges that this world provides us.

And then the second reading was from Revelations which is a prophetic book in the New Testament, it's really the only prophetic book in the New Testament; the Old Testament a whole section of Prophecy, but this is prophetic; in saying this is what the future is going to look like and it's written by the same writer John, who wrote the Gospel and he's writing now in a prison at Patmos and he has this vision of a

New Jerusalem. Now that should sound familiar as well and I couldn't possibly ignore reading from that text; because we are in a church called Church of the Holy City and it is so named from this text; so this church takes its name from this Bible verse holy city, it describes a holy city. And it describes the New Jerusalem and for those who don't know who're interested, this denomination's real official title and name is the Church of the New Jerusalem and this text is sort of its guiding vision statement. So these texts I think tie together very nicely. One is Jesus saying love one another; it's almost the mission statement for Christianity and then we go to Revelations and it's almost like a vision statement for Christianity. This is what the future is going to look like.

One thing that makes this faith different from most traditions in Christianity is that most believe that Jesus is coming again physically in the world, there will be a punishment period, for the people who remain on earth; others will be lifted up in the rapture. We don't believe that. We believe that this text is saying that a spiritual evolution is taking place in the world and that new spiritual teachings are descending and that the descent of New Jerusalem is really deeper understanding, greater love, than evolution that we could have heaven on Earth and that's what we're moving toward. So that's how we see that text and together they really fit in nicely. So these are two beautiful texts. The problem would be that here we are this many years later and the challenge of loving each other is still a huge challenge and even more challenging is that if I went out on to 16th Street and said to people "Christianity, what do you think describes it? Just give me a line of description. I probably got: intolerance, discrimination, judgmental, maybe some charity, maybe

some good; but the idea that Christians are known for their love still remains a challenge for the Christian church. So both in our own life, learning to love one another is a challenge and it's continuous throughout our whole life and the role of the New Jerusalem descending into the world is still a challenge for us today.

And so, as I was thinking about the text I asked myself: so what do we do? How can we love more? What could we practically do on a daily basis? Are there any secrets? Is there something we can do; because I do believe it's a product of spiritual evolution; I don't think we can do it ourselves. I think we can only do it, through the love of God working through us. So we have to be tapped into that first of all. But in my own life I thought of a couple different ways that I've seen it happen and that may be practical things. One is that the opposite of love for me- most people would say it's hate- I think it's fear. And I find that when I'm not loving, it's usually based on some fear. Fear of scarcity; I'm not going to have enough money; I'm not going to get my fair share; I'm not going to get treated the way I should be treated; they don't like me; they don't include me. So I find that fear and scarcity generally leads to a lack of love and it's when I'm least loving is when I'm afraid. And what can we do about that? I think, you know it hit me this last week as I was in the hospital for two weeks- the ICU, the hospital, let's face it, these are like the least pleasant places to be in. No matter how hard they try to be, the beeping, the smell, people screaming, you know beds coming in and out, it's a tough place, particularly when you're with people that you love and they're in pain, and I thought to myself I'm handling this better, because of something I did many years ago, in the 80's; because I've been around awhile, I was very afraid of the whole idea of AIDS and It was all

mythology and fear and I became an AIDS buddy and what that meant was you visited with a person on a weekly basis and you bought them groceries and so on and so forth but in those days the average length of time with your buddy was two months before they passed, it was so fast and you were in the hospital quite a bit and so I saw the whole hospital system in my 20's, early 20's, so it's not so fearful for me. I think that when we have fears, if we step into them. Sometimes our fears are like a tiger, out there in the grass and we can hear it and we are afraid of it; but if we can confront it, very often it goes away. So stepping into your fear and facing it, can actually, I think, create more compassion, more love we can grow.

The other lesson that I've experienced in my own life about increasing my love, could be taken out of the text, where Jesus I said, was with Judas and with Peter and he's talking about love. In my own life, I found people who I hate or I want to hate, okay- really dislike; I find they're my best spiritual teachers, that they are almost brought into my life for a certain time to be a spiritual teacher, because if I give in to their terrible person and I'm a great person, I grow not at all, the relationship doesn't grow and the world has a little bit more hate, right. If I can look at them and say okay what's my shadow; what's my dark side here, that I am so angry at this person. How can I flip it? How can I love that person? And if I can love that person in my personal life, what a great lesson for me and then I can take it further into the world. I think Jesus there with Peter and Judas and then teaching that within that context might be an indication of how we might also do it.

And then the third thing tying in this whole New Jerusalem, this spiritual world that's coming into being, I find it's very easy to get completely negative about the world. We read about terrorism; we have accidents in our family; things don't go the way we've planned; we're disappointed and we read the paper, we watch the news and it's kind of geared towards sensational sadness; it can kind of put you in a bit of a funk and you say is the world getting better or worse? And I'm a huge fan. I believe the world has definitely evolved into a better state; we are in a much better place. I think the world is more loving. I think we're a lot more aware of each other even globally than we were.

In this last week, I have an example what I would say of that kind of descending of the Holy Spirit, the New Jerusalem; when I got an email from Uganda and it was a group of gals and guys who produced- they are tailors- they produce clothing but they are also being harassed because I guess a bunch of them are gay and in Uganda it's illegal and they are actually putting people in prison and killing them. And so he reached out to me on LinkedIn and said could you advise our business to help us create a social enterprise, that we might survive right now because all of our contracts are being shut down and then the name of this program was the Christian Tailor Program- something like that- and at the end of the conversation we had a good discussion on Skype; he said what an amazing world it is that God could connect us through Skype and you're in Washington and I'm in Uganda and maybe you can help me but even if you can't; you listened to me and I'm going to tell my people about you and it was, I thought to myself that's the internet, technology, Skype; these things can have extremely transformational and spiritual power

for love in the world. So I'm going to make a pitch, that we're getting better, we're evolving all the time; both personally and in the world and that the new Jerusalem is coming in this holy city, this heaven on Earth to the extent that we learn to love.

Amen.