

Sermon - John 15:1-17 I John 4:7-12 May 10, 2009

Such Great Love Through Us – Amazing Grace

Can we ever get it straight? Can we ever get the truth? Is there anything or anyone to really trust? Is there anyone who is truly good? Any role models to be followed? Heroes to be honored? Is there any truly really good news, Please?

Sometimes – even the Gospel, the Good News, doesn't sound so very good. It sounds hard, harsh, feels heavy. Bear fruit – or be cut off and burned up. A bit harsh, a bit heavy. This is my commandment – orders from headquarters. Get out there and be loving.

I hear the word – but I'm still listening for Good news, in a time when there is precious if any good news at all. I mean – have you heard much? Or maybe it is there, if we can turn our ears and hearts to hear it. Maybe it's in the opening lines of our last hymn...

Called as partners in Christ's service? Maybe we are to be the Good News for one another and for the world?

Please pray with me. Lord of life, give us ears to hear, to really hear your word – that the words of my mouth and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people will sound a note of hope and promise and even joy in our lives through Jesus Christ... Amen.

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

There it is. Almost buried in all the words about vine and branches, and being connected or cut off, about obeying commandments... At the heart of it is God's will that we might know joy in our lives. Thank you Lord, thank you Jesus.

And – to my amazement – over and over again – when we love on another, there is joy – and good news – light in the darkest of times.

Friday night it was at a Church Chicken Pot Pie Supper. And - I'm sorry, but that has never been a recipe for an exciting night out for me – or for much joy. And even though this was a very special Chicken Pot Pie Supper – part of the 125th Anniversary Celebration of the Church I served for 12 years in Battle Creek, slightly mushy Chicken Pot Pie is never good news or cause for joy in my life.

And if it had been about the meal – that night would have been in keeping with the news and mood of these days in all of our lives - down – not up. One drum beat of bad news after another. Car maker bankruptcies, plant shut downs, job losses, dealers closing, and - now – swine flu, too. Fires and floods and tornadoes.

Even my trip to South Africa and the mess and real sadness of so much medicine lost by the airlines - lingers for me as another dark cloud with no silver lining.

And – wonder in it all - the words – Jesus’ words – do echo in my inner ear. Do get my attention. Do turn African Trip disappointment, and a slightly soggy Chicken Pot Pie Supper, into Good News, into joyous good news. And maybe Jesus’ words can do that for us, for you, in thinking about these times in which we live.

The supper. It wasn’t about the food at all. It was about 125 years of faithfulness on the part of a people who – not all the time, but most of the time, put their confidence and trust in God. People who loved one another, better than they normally would – because they knew that God loved them and had called them in Jesus Christ to love one another.

And that is Good News. People who love one another. Perfectly? Not at all. There were people at that supper who hardly spoke to me because I had not been exactly the minister they wanted me to be.

But the church is there, and people are cared for in the Church and in that community, and beyond, giving 1/3 of everything to Mission - because the call of Jesus Christ has been heard.

Africa – another faith lesson learned by this preacher. Medicine lost. Less pain easing, health helping drugs and vitamins to share with people who waited all year for us to come.. Disappointment, Discouragement – Disaster? NO. Strange wonder – because we had less to give out – somehow – we focused less on the medicine we didn’t have - and more on the people who came. We listened more, heard more, were moved to care more, and prayed more - and yes – maybe had more love for each other - maybe even brought more joy than we might otherwise have done. God’s amazing grace.

Two weeks ago some very wet Presbyterians sat on sheets of plastic covering the furniture of the woman who was being helped by the Rebuilding Together program our Church has helped to sponsor. And that scene - Presbyterians willing to be all wet – I mean – nearly Baptists - captured a bit – the right mood – the good mood – of that day - And More?

Because I think, I hope, maybe that can be an image that captures our minds and hearts in these very tough days. And mothers. Your mothers and mothers the world over – life giving, self giving love giving mothers. Models for us or life’s promise and hope.

If we love one another, care for one another, as God has loved us and cared for us in Jesus Christ, our joy will be complete.

In the loving, the caring, the helping and comforting of one another, there is the good news, the best news, there can be.

One of our members walking in the rain carrying a heavy box of rummage from the sale this week - to an older woman's old car - a labor of love. Amazing Grace.

Such acts, such a spirit, will help keep this place for years to come – being a place where people can see – yes – the wonder of God's creation for us, but also know and experience through us the wonder of God's gracious amazing forever life giving love.

In the face of all the fearful financial facts of this time – in spite of all the negative news about people, and their sad and sinful ways, in spite of this, there is good news. There is very Good news, and reasons for joy.

In the truth we can discover over and over and over again, - the truth of God's love for us – and what that love – shared by us – can do.

What counted most in Africa – and I think I finally got the message – was not the medicine at all – but most of all that because of God's word to us in Christ, we cared enough to go – to share, to care, to try to love as we've been loved.

What counts most here, and in this campaign we are in the midst of now – is not the building we have built, or even the Habitat Home - it is the core of care for securing the future of ministry, our ministry of caring christ-like love – in this community, and beyond.

Good news? You want Good News? It really isn't that hard to find. Jesus said it - He who lived it best. If we love one another as God has loved us, we will be the Good news people want and need to hear. And we will know it in our own lives. Deep and lasting joy. God's Amazing Grace - alive in us. Great Good News. Amen.

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