

Sermon - September 18, 2022

So I'm curious, how many, and you don't have to raise your hand but I want you to think about it, how many of you became significantly uncomfortable when I said we were about to start a stewardship series? Stewardship has gotten to become a touchy subject in churches, because often when we hear that word we jump to money. We think that the only reason the church does a stewardship series is to convince us that we have to give more money to the church. I am here, standing here, to tell you that has nothing to do with the stewardship series we are going to be going through the next four weeks. In fact, I'm not even preaching on the passage from Luke which deals with wealth and money and all of that. I am focusing on the letter from 1 John, because stewardship isn't just about money. I'm not saying it's not, and I am saying that we do need to be mindful of what we do with the money that God gives to us, but that's not going to be our focus.

A steward, by definition, is someone who manages the property of someone else. Someone that takes care of something on behalf of another. So, stewardship doesn't just encompass our financial life, it encompasses all our life. The thing that we are charged to be stewards of, that we often don't even think about, is God's love. We are all stewards of God's love. God, the creator of our world, created each one of us uniquely special, loves each one of us, and fills us with God's love. We are called to take care of that. We are called to manage that. We are called to share that. For the next four weeks we're going to look at 'with whom am I called to share.'

One of the reasons the Elders and the Joint Board picked this particular series is because it connects with us as Moravians. We have two mottos. One we see on a weekly basis because it's part of our Moravian seal. You read it up by the cross every time you sit in the sanctuary if you look up, "Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow him." To follow means to do something. You can't stand still and follow anyone. It means taking steps to be with, to learn from, to be with. So, we follow Jesus, and to follow Jesus we seek to do what Jesus did. That's where our other Moravian motto comes in. "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love." In all things, love. I think our society has forgotten that piece. We have become so divisive that even just the thought that someone's political prospect or understanding is the opposite of ours, prevents us from even getting to know that person or showing love to that person. It begins to shut us down. Maybe I'm the only one that that happens with. Confession time. I struggle when I see certain lawn signs out in our community. Especially when they are in the yards of people who proclaim to be Christian, and they call names, and they call for bad things to happen to the person that they don't like. That is *not* love. Love is being able to stand in the midst of conflict and say, 'I may not agree with you, but I am not going to think less of you. I am not going to act negatively toward you. I don't have to change my opinion, but I can choose, in love, not to respond negatively; to see in you God's image.'

Our scriptures begin by telling us we are all, every single person, created in the image of God. We are all, every single person, loved by our creator, our Heavenly Father. Yet, we live in a world that loves hierarchy more than people. We live in a world that is constantly telling us we need to put things in certain orders, so that we know who's on top and who's on the bottom. Then we struggle when we read the scriptures that tell us to love, because God is love. We become like the gentleman who asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" When we're told to love our neighbors he says, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus tells him a story about the person that is supposed to be his enemy helping someone like him. (By the way, if you look at the parable of this Good Samaritan, the Samaritan never asks who that person beaten on the ground is. Never says, 'what did you do to lead to being beaten? Because if it's something that you did then you know if it was your choice and I don't agree with the decision that you made then I'm not going to help you.' Doesn't say, 'You know what are you going to do once I help make you well? Is that would I agree with what you're going to do?') The Samaritan simply sees a child of God beaten and in need. Puts that child of God on the donkey. Takes him to a place where he can be healed, and doesn't stop there. Though he cannot be there continually he says, "I will pay whatever you need to make sure this one is cared for." No questions asked. No saying, 'How will they use the money that I give you?' Simply meeting that need. He loved in the way that we are called to love as followers of God.

John reminds the church, verse 19 of 1 John:4. It's in your bulletin, "We love because God first loved us." We love because we are loved. We may not feel worthy of God's love sometimes. We may feel guilty because we're not loving God or doing the things that God asks of us, but God still loves us. No questions asked. We are loved. God loves us so much that God showed us what love was, and gave us the way to be

forgiven for our sins. John, in the same letter earlier, tells us how that happens. 1 John chapter 2 starting with the second half of the first verse, "...But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins..." Forgiveness, grace, love. But it's not just for us. John continues, "...and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." We're stewards of the love of God. That's a great big love, and we're called to share that love.

This week we get to think about how we love others, our love for one another, specifically this church family. Some of us were born into this church family and only know this place as the place where they have come to know and love God because of the people around us. Others have chosen. Having walked in and been welcomed, have chosen to make this the place where we experience God's love through others so that we can share God's love. But this place, these people, whether we're inside the building or outside of the building, are our brothers and sisters of the faith. The ones to whom we can go when we are struggling, when we are in need, when we are seeking comfort. The ones that we can celebrate with when good things happen in our lives. This is a place where we can talk about God, where we can ask questions about God, where we can study God's word as we seek to grow in relationship with our God and with one another. This body is the church. This group of people is holy and beloved. Here is where we learn about love, God's love for us. We learn how to be stewards to share that love with others.

So today as we think about our love for one another, thinking about our church family, I want you to pull out that heart. That little piece of paper that you got when you came into worship, this little one. You'll notice in your pews there are some pencils in front of you in the stands. I want you to think about what you love about our church family. I want you, during the singing of our closing hymn, to write on your heart. You don't need to sign it, but I want you to write on your heart one thing you love about your church family. Then as we depart from the sanctuary you'll notice there's a white board that's completely empty. There's also a little thing of tape on the table right beside it. This is why, if you're comfortable and want to write your name go right ahead, but there's no requirement that you write your name. There's no requirement that you tape it up there, but if you are willing, we'd like you to share with one another what you love about your church family. So, I ask invite you to take a piece of that tape and maybe roll it in half and put it on the back and then tape it up. Or simply just tape up your heart, so that we can begin, as stewards, to share. To manage God's love in a way that glorifies God. In a way that continues to become a ripple effect. God's love for us, loving one another, which will love us others, which will help us love our neighbors, which will help us love our world. It begins individually and continues outward. How are we, how are we doing being stewards of God's love for one another? Maybe that's a question to think about not just now, but every day.

Let us pray. Holy Lord and God, we thank you that you love us no matter what. We thank you for the challenge that you give us in asking us to love one another. We thank you for the ways that we've experienced your love within this place and from these, our brothers and sisters. We pray that you will continue to open our eyes and our hearts to the ways that we can show your love. May all we do and say, Lord God, bring you glory, as we seek for your kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven. For we pray this in your holy and loving name. Amen.