

SUNDAY May 18, 2025      “How Can I Love Others?”

Acts 11: 1-18   Revelation 21:1-6   John 13: 31-35

“They’ll know we are Christians by our love..” is a song written by a Catholic priest, Peter Scholtes, who was serving at St. Brendan's parish on the South Side of Chicago in 1966. He was looking for a song to accompany a series of ecumenical and interracial events for the youth choir which he led. It is based on Jesus’ new commandment : Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

The verses state “We are one in the Spirit.. and we pray for all unity to be restored; we will walk with each other hand in hand- spreading the news of God’s presence; we will work side by side- to save each one’s dignity and pride;

Just imagine this- ‘the club requires everyone to answer the following questions;

- 1) will people even your enemies say you care for others
- 2) are you someone who loves people when other people ignore them
- 3) Do you love people when they don’t love you back?
- 4) Do you serve others- willingly?
- 5) Do you love others when it costs you something?
- 6) Would you die for your friends out of love.?

What would you say? How would you respond? Would you pass the initiation? For many people- the cost is too high, the expectations of serving others is too uncertain. Yet this is what the church has been asking people to do for hundreds of years. This is what Jesus wants us to do even now. This is what we are called to do as faithful followers of the Risen Christ. We are needing to share and show love; we are indeed a group of people who know of the One who died and rose again. We are to love others. Because God does love all- unconditionally. This love without judgment is often shared when a couple marries because at the heart of a marriage relationship is love and trust. To describe this unconditional love is to say it is love with no bounds and is unchanging. This unconditional part of loving others is difficult because we can say we love others, but do we always?

What happens when the other offends, hurts, tattles on another to a third party? This love is tested in more ways than one. So it is when one is called unkind or evil and the one who says it is really looking in the mirror and searching for love in different ways.

And this unconditional love is also far reaching and inclusive than people first thought. Our reading from Acts 11 takes place many years after Jesus has ascended in to heaven. Those people who were Jesus' disciples are now working to telling of his nature and that it is Peter's report to the church in Jerusalem that stirs up trouble. OR so it seems. The people ask Peter why he eats with uncircumcised men-- that is Gentiles. Why did Peter speak to those who were not Jewish? That is not the same as himself- or as he appeared to others?

The people in Jerusalem see him as a Jewish man, taught not to associate with Gentiles, year here is Peter with Jewish men and had been seen with Gentiles. As a means of explanation, he describes his experience when he was in Joppa as having had a vision. There, something like a large sheet was coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners and it came close to him. When he looked closely he saw 4 footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice- get up and kill and eat. But his response was the nothing profane or unclean had ever entered his mouth. When the voice spoke again, "What God has made clean you must not call profane." Three more times it occurred then everything went back up to heaven.

Then 3 men from Caesarea Philippi arrived at the door. Peter was told to go with them as these men had been instructed to get Peter and to another house. As Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon him and the disciples. Peter then stated that he had remembered that John baptized with water, but they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit. With this logic, Peter stated if God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in Jesus, who was I? that I should hinder God. Silence fell in the room and then they praised God. God had given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life. By logical consideration all were welcome to receive baptism of forgiveness, all are eligible for repentance which leads to new life in Christ. All are welcome.

In recent years there has been a push to welcome specific groups of people into our midst as people who worship. Yes there have been places where people were not welcomed because they did not conform to the old ways of worshipping God. Some of us might remember having to wear gloves and hats, men were always in white shirts and ties and suits. Children often resembled their parents in dressing for church as they were required to show respect in

God's house and for those who watched. But today we may look a little more relaxed in what we wear but there is still the need to welcome.

Glenwood Church has helped many people of all different backgrounds through its history as they sought to establish themselves as Canadian roots. There was not a question of numbers, but a need to show unconditional love in action. To look beyond differences and see that what is at heart is that all have been created in God's image and we as followers of Jesus are to love others. The net which Peter envisioned filled with different kinds of animals which were deemed unclean and not to be included, were now open to be received. For Peter, realized that God's Spirit comes upon all those who believe and all are able to receive this Spirit. All are welcome without using labels or offending others. All are welcome. Just like those first Gentiles who received God's Spirit in a manner to which they were unaccustomed. Just like everyone and each one who comes to worship, to receive commune and who seek to find their way in the hope of eternal life. All are loved.

We may not always understand each other's motives, reasons or rational but we do love others. We may not always agree but because there are 2 or 3 or more gathered together in the name of Jesus. Christ is present and in our midst so that the Spirit will connect us as followers in faith. And what is our end goal?

Our goal is to experience John's vision where we are one with Christ in God's heavenly realm; where the river of life flows near the tree of life, the throne of God and the Lamb all brightly lit by God's presence. And this tree of life guides our movements and thinking wherever we go and in whatever we say and do.

We remember this because we are called to love God, others and self. We are to welcome others as Jesus welcomes all. We are to extend the blessings of the Spirit to all who hear and want to see and know God's unconditional love. This is our purpose and our mission. How can we love others? By learning how to do what matters- loving and caring for those whom God sends and from whom we learn together about Christ Jesus our Saviour.

So how can we love others? In all that we say and do-- remembering that we can love, because God first loved us. Thanks be to God. Amen,

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