

A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Pentecost 17, September 1, 2013, dedicated on this Labor Sunday to the men who are restoring the Jeffrey Window of First Church, to Grace Glaros as she works to get well, for Barbara Knox and family as they gather to celebrate and remember David Knox with great love and thanksgiving, and always to the glory of God!

“Jesus is Love”

Jeremiah 2:4-13; Luke 14: 7-14;

John 8:1-11

(Part V of V in the sermon series “What a Difference Jesus Makes”)

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Love and forgiveness are inextricably connected. Jesus’ spirit of love was deeply connected to his spirit of forgiveness and nonviolence. This was demonstrated throughout his life but perhaps no better than one day when Jesus was teaching in the Temple of Jerusalem.

A woman was brought to him and thrown at his feet. The gathering crowd sought to condemn the woman and trap Jesus. They confronted him with this question: *“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”*

They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up and said, *“All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!”* Then he stooped down and wrote in the dust. One by one the accusers slipped away, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, *“Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”* *“No, Lord,”* she said. And Jesus said, *“Neither do I. Go and sin no more”* (John 8:1-11).

Jesus had a way with words. His quiet words in this story exploded the situation. In the piercing glare of judgment, each man saw himself in his literal sense. Each was not a judge of another’s deeds, but of his own. The woman, too, saw herself as one who sinned, but was exposed by Jesus as one who was forgiven. Howard Thurman puts it this way in *Jesus and the Disinherited*:

“Jesus demonstrated reverence for personality. *He met this woman where she was and loved her, treating her as if she were already where she now willed to be. He believed her into the fulfillment of her possibilities. He stirred her confidence in activity. He placed a crown over her head, which for the rest of her life she would keep trying to grow tall enough to wear.”* (Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, Nashville, TN, 1959, p. 106).

This is true love. The love of Jesus is a love that will not let us go. His love believes us to be who we were created to be by God. His love believes us into wholeness. His love gently and firmly grants us confidence and the assurance of pardon and possibilities – all at the same time. It is a love that changes us from the place of human judgment to divine grace and forgiveness.

When face to face with Judas and the betrayal of his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus tells them at the Passover Seder, *“A new command I give you: 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.”* (John 13:34-35). Love,

only love, in the face of betrayal and death – that is the love of Jesus our Savior.

Christopher Washington was the very first person to respond to my inquiries about “How Jesus has changed your life.” He wrote on the expansiveness of Jesus as he teaches us to love – and where that love will ultimately lead us in our lifetime. Christopher wrote:

“I think first about the concept of loving thy neighbor, despite the many differences you have with them. Historical accounts up to the birth and life of Jesus was all about violence that occurred that advanced human civilization, while at the same time masking the violence perpetrated on victims. The tellers of history and reinventors of culture all appear to have some moral monopoly. Maybe poets excepted!

“Jesus’ life enabled us to acknowledge the importance of the victims of violence, the most significant lesson being that humans can perpetrate violence even against his own creator! He also put forth the ideas that enabled us to imagine a life, for oneself and others, beyond the violence that either destroys or restores humanity and cultures.

“What flows from this thinking in my opinion? Everything from civil rights movements and peacekeeping organizations, to peaceful relations between previously warring nations, the establishment of the EU, post-civil war unity, fenceless suburban yards, international community and desegregated neighborhoods, to open and affirming churches. I think that Jesus’ influence is everywhere and extends well beyond Christian communities.

“When I am at my best, I remember his message of love thy neighbor.”

Anne Hudson also picked up on Jesus’ love and presence with all people in the worst of all situations. Anne writes:

“One of the first images coming to mind when you put those questions to us is that of Jesus being amongst us, especially his presence amongst the poor.

“The intentionality of his being, his being amongst, his being in all kinds of situations and circumstances, stands out particularly in my reflections. This has made a difference in that his accessibility to ALL, therefore, is guaranteed. Simply asking, simply bringing to mind any of the stories of his life, there will be for each of us a listening of him to manifest power.”

Jim Fewlass picks up on the love of Jesus for the disinherited as he writes:

“Jesus is on the opposite side of whatever current popular wisdom is touting. He also places us purposefully in life as those who give and provide for and welcome those who have no money. If one has money, as with Mary Magdalene, one is to give and provide for and welcome those who have no money and to lead the church in that direction. The way to provide for the recovery of abundance to the economy is to forgive all debt so that everyone has the ability to provide for themselves and others—in other words, to live into the Jubilee!

“Jesus’ personal relation with me and anyone will always involve the dashing of little gods that I and anyone else loves instead of God, who wants all of the above and a personal, corporate and communal community relationship with all of God's creatures and creation, even me.”

Jesus’ love is shown in forgiveness, in grace, in nonviolence leading to peace, in a heart for the poor, in actions for others, in sharing our resources with those who have little to none. Jesus’ love is demonstrated in overcoming evil with good; through embracing the one who betrays us and leads us to judgment even when we are innocent; in overcoming our desires to judge others, knowing that we are not sinless. Jesus’ love is an all-rounder. It does not let us choose one thing, but not the other. It is for all time. It is unconditional love.

And now we stand at the end of our series. The question remains: “*What difference does Jesus make in your life?*”

This was the question put to each member of our congregation almost four months ago. Sixty-five people responded directly to me over the past four months. But, in truth, all of us must fashion our own response in everyday living.

The questions may take different shapes and forms in your life. I have fashioned only a few responses based on your thoughts. How are you more loving because the Son of God has loved you? How has the living proof of Jesus made a difference in your life? How has he been your healer and teacher? How has he been your protector and hope? How has he been the real presence of resurrected life for you?

Moreover, how is Jesus alive and well in your daily life?

I end where I began with this quote from Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who told the world in 1906 what a difference Jesus made in his life with his ground-breaking book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*:

“He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words: ‘Follow thou me!’ and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.” Quoted from *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1956), p. 403.

May God bless and keep each one of us, as “the Light of the World,” Jesus the Christ, breaks forth into our lives more and more each day. And may we follow him as he sets us to the tasks that he has to fulfill in our time. Amen.

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