

“Love This, Love That”

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

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Confirmand

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From the Pulpit

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The New York Times recently released an article that my mom directed me to called “Good Friends.” The article is fairly short, but it talks about the contrast between having fewer friends or more friends. In short, it’s good to have a balance of the two, because too few friends could make you lonely, and too many friends could overwhelm you.

God has told us many times throughout scripture to love everyone. We are called to love our neighbors, our friends, and even our enemies.

God tells us to love “this,” and love “that.” However many friends we gain or lose, we shouldn’t stop loving them. During the journey of our confirmation class, we began eleven strong, and have since been reduced to seven people. The four who left us had their valid reasons. But just because they’re no longer with us on the journey of confirmation doesn’t mean we don’t still love them. They, like everyone else, are children of God, placed in our path.

Though everyone is a child of God, some don’t abide by God’s will, making it more difficult for us to love them. Throughout the world’s history, there have been plenty of instances of war, infighting, and cruelty that push against God’s dream for humanity. An unfortunate example of the oppression of God’s children by their own brothers and sisters was the Holocaust, where millions of Jews, in particular, were murdered.

The “Inscription of Hope” anthem we sang for you tells the story of Jewish refugees from the Holocaust. The people who wrote the lyrics to that song were holding on to a specific kind of love. It’s the kind of love where you have to blindly put your trust in God, and recognize that what’s happening is God’s will. It’s this kind of love that manifests as hope. And hope, as a verb, can be a difficult thing to do. To have to endure suffering, and have trust in God that it will end, must have taken immense strength from those Jewish refugees that hid in the cellar in Cologne. They channeled their grievances, and their hope, into words, which found themselves on the cellar walls. “I believe in love, even when there’s no one there. I believe in God, even when he is silent.”

The thing is, the Holocaust ended. And there was a reason why it ended. The mass murder and suffering appealed to the humanity of the other children of God, and they took it upon themselves to end it. Now that is what God dreamt of for humanity. God’s children helping each other along the road of life.

Children of God are called to love each other. They are called to love each other no matter their differences. But if one child looks up to the sky and thinks about a child they have never met in their life, can they still love them without knowing them? ———— Yes. Because this is the entire purpose of their being children of God. Love. God is not a demanding or angry deity. God is loving, and he created us in his image, which means we are loving.

Now, there’s a quote I really like from today’s Acts reading: “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” And I think what this means is that God created all of us. God is a pure being, and is loving. Then, when God created us, he made us in his image. By

that logic, we are also clean, pure beings, and are loving. If you take a glance at someone who's different, your first thought might be a little bit "eh." But remember that God created both of you in his image.

Nowadays, there's a lot not to love going on in the world. COVID-19 still has the planet in a chokehold, the Supreme Court has some questionable ideas, and a major war recently began in Eastern Europe. However, there's been something building up over the past couple of centuries. We could call it an "era of love." Since the Enlightenment, new ideals of life, love, and happiness have been developing. It wasn't until the 1960s and 70s that these concepts really exploded. With the appearance of the "hippie" culture, and now everything that's been going on recently with LGBTQ+ rights, and even a little farther back with the civil rights movement and racial equality. As I was scrolling through YouTube a couple weeks ago, I stumbled across a community post. It posed the question: "Do you support the LGBTQ+ community?" When I voted, I was pleased to see that the "yesses" outnumbered the "nos."

This shows that people can and do abide by God's will for us to love each other.

God wants us to love "this," and love "that." It can be easy to love some things and some people, especially if you share a close bond with them, such as family, friends, and people who share your interests. Things that are appealing to you, like puppies, cocktails, sunsets, and ice cream, are easy to love as well. What's not to love about this?—— The thing is, it's harder to love that puppy when it's tearing up your couch. But it's harder still to recognize the humanity of people who have committed horrendous acts against humanity, like the oppressive dictators of the past, and even the present. But

even through everything they've done, it's crucial to remember that like everyone else, they are still a child of God, and are still loved by him. Of course, it doesn't justify what they've done, but it's still important to remember. And just maybe, if you take some time to think about that, you might make a connection.

One area where I made a huge connection recently, was confirmation. At the beginning of confirmation, our class didn't talk much. Only the people who already knew each other fairly well would talk. Otherwise, it was silent. Then, as we did more activities that allowed us to get to know each other, we began to open up. And, finally, at the confirmation retreat, we suddenly became connected as friends. Only when we were seated together at a dinner table, or decided to play ball games with each other did we finally become friends. We started out by believing that we were too different, and as a result would not become friends. It took sitting together for meals and playing games outside for us to finally hit it off.

At the end of the retreat, Reverend Ahrens called us together for an evening communion ceremony. We reflected on our confirmation journey, and the joys that the retreat had brought us. But, just before we began our communion, Reverend Ahrens offered a piece of advice that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. He said to "look for one good thing each day." How about we also look for one God thing each day? This can be hard to do if you look around and see the world right now. But, if you just look for that one good thing, and think about it for a bit, you'll realize it's actually one God thing.

As humans and children of God, our earthly life can feel tense. We are often torn between a want to love "this," and our charge by God to love "that" as well. As Christians, God's charge to us is to serve

and love others. Faithfully serving a neighbor doesn't mean you have to know them as you do a family member. The driving force that motivates your service is God's love.

Love this, love that, and you'll find good and God things everywhere you look.