

Each of the scripture lessons today is so juicy for a preacher: the passage about Jeremiah being told not to be afraid to talk because God has put his own words on Jeremiah's lips.....the psalm about God being rock and strength and safety, then there's the LOVE chapter. And The Gospel lesson has always been so compelling to me --- Jesus being turned on by people who knew and loved him best.....and whenever I'm called to preach on these lessons that's always the one I choose. But this year is different.

This year is different because I have nothing new to say about the gospel lesson. And so much MORE to say about --- the LOVE chapter, I Corinthians chapter 13.

This year is different because this year I have grandchildren. And even more importantly, I have children who are now parents.

Parenthood, much like church, is a veritable training school for patience and love. When you have children, you find a whole new kind of love. It's no coincidence that God chose to reveal himself to us as a parent, and his most treasured relationship is that with his child, Jesus Christ. God has seen fit to imbue new mothers with a hormonal rush which will insure, if they are healthy and stable, they will feed and cuddle and protect their children no matter how little sleep they get or how much crying their babies do.

I remember when Raleigh was about 4 months old, I was driving and she was in her carseat in the back and someone ran a stopsign and came very close to crashing into her side of the car. After I stopped I had a rush of rage that I had never felt before and have never felt since. There's no telling what I might have done to that other driver if I'd had a chance.

When you're a grandparent, you are rewarded with seeing that the love you gave your children is being passed on to another generation. And it multiplies the love you have for them. You can see that special fierce parent love has made a difference. Seeing my daughters turn into mothers who are CRAZY in love with their babies, seeing them "get" that special kind of parent love, I can't help but wonder if that's how pleased God is when we love others as we have been loved by God. that God's love is being multiplied millions of times over as we spread the good news of his love to others in the world. And there's absolutely no limit to that love.

God calls us to love like God loves. St Paul spends this 13th chapter in his first letter to the Corinthians telling us how we can make that happen.

If you've ever attended a wedding, and it might not even have to be a wedding in a church, you've heard those familiar words of I Corinthians Chapter 13; Love is patient. Love is kind. Love never ends. Love is not irritable or resentful. Love rejoices in the truth.

Although it never hurt anyone to hear these words as they were about to get married, these words were not intended by St. Paul to be instruction for two young kids not knowing what they're getting into when they say I do.....they were instructions for a community of church people who had been fighting with each other. People who'd been at the end of their rope, not patient. People who were mean and snarky, not kind. People who were about ready to call it quits.

Paul goes on to explain that you have to grow into love. You have to choose to love and practice love. Except from the love you have from God, You don't just HAVE love for one another.. But since we're human dealing with other humans, we all have to work on love for a lifetime.

Ever googled "love"? Well there are 6.18 trillion results, most of which have no place in my sermon today I assure you. There are entries about love trying to describe it: Euphoric feeling. Addiction. How to get it and keep it. Lots of people have made careers out of coaching people about how to love.

We are made in the image of God. We learn slowly but surely how to love as God loves by paying attention for God-like love in all kinds of places. Where can we find that love in the world?

We can learn God's kind of love by studying the stories of Jesus. By watching how Jesus treats others, and by watching how Jesus does NOT treat others, we see an example of loving as God loves. And it's not always about feeling good. Or making someone else feel good. In the scene in the synagogue in today's Gospel, Jesus had just pleased everyone by reading and teaching on a beautiful passage of scripture, and he could have stopped there and soaked up the love.

But he knew that people were stuck and needed to move on to the truth behind those beautiful words. So Jesus pushed his hometown audience to the understanding that God's love was going beyond the bounds of Israel, to include people those in his audience weren't especially fond of. Jesus told them the truth at a cost to himself. Truth telling is part of the practice of love.

We can learn God's kind of love by watching animals. I have no idea whether my cats love me, but when I had a dog, I certainly knew that unconditional, absolute love. I came across an old CBS feature this weekend about a loving animal relationship that will probably make me cry just in telling you about it: at an animal sanctuary, an elephant and a dog became the best of friends. They did everything together. When the dog got sick, and had to be inside the shelter away from his friend, the elephant kept vigil right outside the shelter night and day. The dog being cared for inside didn't wag his tail, until the caretaker carried him outside to see his elephant friend. As the dog

improved, he would allow his elephant friend to show him affection by rubbing his tummy with her massive foot. Love never ending is certainly part of the practice to love.

We can learn of God's kind of love by reading about the lives of people who figured out how to love. We call them saints. Saints aren't people who were created any differently than you or me, but they figured out how to be who God wanted them to be, and how to love as God loved no matter the cost.

The most difficult lessons of love are learned in community. It's ironic that you can be a loving community without actually liking everyone it. Paul tells us love is something we need to work on to get it right, and that we will never get it right until we are face to face with God in larger life. Being loving in a community such as a small church like ours, is more about how we treat each other to our faces and behind our backs and less about how we feel about each other. It's about treating each other with respect and dignity, as we have promised in our baptismal covenant.

Just because we're Christian doesn't make it easy. Just because we all love Jesus doesn't mean it's not work learning how to love each other. But we can be practitioners of love by heeding Paul's words.

At our best, the church is a model for the world how to love. The church often is NOT a good example because we often have lost our focus on learning and teaching love, and focus more on morality.

What will the neighbors think? It doesn't matter so much what our neighbors think about us. But it matters that our neighbors think about God ¹when they watch how we treat each other and interact with those who are in need of our help and think.... Wow, they love like God loves. They are kind and patient. Not arrogant.

Love is a life-long lesson to learn. We eventually grow into the love God has intended for us. Whether we've learned when we were children or are learning it from our grandchildren, may the Church of the Resurrection always be a laboratory of God's love.

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