

"When you read the sermon for yourself - try to hear Pastor Paula's tone and pace of speech. This sermon is written to be spoken and may not be grammatically correct. If you would like to hear it go to the UCC Sanbornton YouTube channel any time - search for the date the sermon was given." Pastor Paula

Sermon:

May 9, 2021

John 15: 9-17

"The Wonderous Love of God"

Mother's Day

Tell the story of the New Commandment – from the perspective of one of the disciples.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing to you O God.

Have you ever thought about it that "love one another as I have loved you", is actually a commandment from Jesus? How did Jesus show love? I don't want to focus on the fact that Jesus died....but focus on how he lived, how he treated people – how he put his love, God's love into action. Jesus' life threw away the idea of an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.

Jesus' love is a joy, not a burden; yet it is not easy or sentimental either. Jesus told the disciples that they were his friends. To become a friend of Jesus carries a commitment and obedience to the commandment he gave "to love one another as I have loved you".

In this scripture, Jesus is telling the disciples that their relationship with one another should align with their relationship to Jesus. One commentator pointed out that Jesus' love helps us to understand what a wondrous love God's love truly

is: a love that has empathetic concern for others; a love that is not possessive or subordinating; a love that allows space for the other to be and is offered without reserve. The love that structures an inner life with God gives us a sense of the pattern of Christian love. Jesus tells the disciples that this kind of love, this kind of friendship, should be so deeply woven into our lives that we might even find ourselves willing to die for it.

For me, Christian love, is a love that I can't really explain. It's a love that is totally from God that one becomes a vessel for God's love. Pastors have opportunities to meet and be with people in times of great trauma and loss. Sometimes with people we have never met before. Sometimes with people who, shall we say, are somewhat difficult. Several years ago, I did a funeral for a young man who overdosed from heroin. He had been in recovery for several months, but as all too often happens, when he relapsed, he overdosed. His older sister found him in his bedroom at home.

This family was in shock and great turmoil and they were not in agreement about how the funeral should be handled. The sister wanted to take the opportunity to tell the truth about his overdose and maybe, in some small way, help others to not have the same ending. The mother however, didn't want anyone to know how he died or any of the circumstances. She was embarrassed and tried desperately not to clue me in on the facts.

I admit that this was challenging for all involved. We met several times before coming to agreement. And I admit to having my own personal opinions about

how I thought it should be handled. Yet, I was surprised by the depth of love and empathy I experienced during this time for each/all of the family members. Each person was coming from a place of love and fear. Each person was coming from a place of grief, shock and sadness. I believe, with all my heart, that it was my relationship with Jesus and my belief in the wonderous love of God that allowed me to be fully present with the family, to be non-judgmental, to be patient and kind as they worked through their differences. To be honest – I'm not always like that! For me this experience was a moment that I was certain of God's love being shared through me.

This is kind of love, that doesn't show up nearly as often as I want it to; it's the kind of love that I believe Jesus is telling his disciples and us today about. The kind of love that is so deeply woven into our lives that when we least expect it, we can share God's wonderous and glorious love with all of God's children.

I know, that I for one, cannot maintain and work on my relationship with God alone. I need to worship with others even if it's live streaming. I need to be consistent with church attendance and study of the scriptures. I need conversations like we have at Seekers to build on the foundation I have nurtured through out my life. I need reminders about the wonderous love of God. And I can't do that alone. May we each strive to seek and follow Jesus' commandment – to love one another as Jesus' loves us. Amen