

Sunday July 13, 2025
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 10

Sermon: “Love”

About a week ago I was invited to read a piece of scripture at the cemetery at the funeral of a young man. His mother wanted me to read 1 Corinthians 13. You know the passage. It's the one in which Paul describes what love is and is not. “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends..... And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” And so, I've spent a bit of time this past week thinking about love. I mean, Paul does a great job of describing love, in an intellectual sort of a way. But it lacks a sense of practical application. What about where the rubber hits the road?

Some years ago, Barbara and I watched a Tom Cruise movie titled *The Last Samurai*. When I watched it, I figured there must be three good sermons in that movie. Today's is one of them. The character played by Cruise is an American soldier who has fought in the Indian wars in the American west. He has served under Custer and now is hired as a mercenary by the Japanese to train and fight with the Imperial Army to put down the revolt headed by the last of the samurai.

Before they are ready for battle they are ordered into service and, predictably, are badly beaten. The Japanese leader, a samurai himself, asks the revolutionaries to help him end his life. He has lost face by losing and, in his culture, must end his life because it is the only way to maintain honour. In the meantime, Cruise has battled several revolutionaries and killed at least one before he is subdued. When the revolutionaries are about to kill him, the last samurai stops them. “That is not their custom,” he says. What he is really saying is, “They are not like us. Their ways are not our ways, even though we find their ways detestable and uncivilized.” Instead Cruise is taken back to their

village in the mountains as a prisoner of war. The leader hopes to learn from Cruise about modern warfare and weaponry.

Cruise awakes and finds himself looking into the eyes of a pretty young woman who is tenderly sewing together the wounds he has received from samurai swords. This woman, whose home he is in, continues to care for him, despite the fact that he is not an honourable man, despite the fact that she says he smells like a pig, despite the fact that he is going through withdrawal from alcoholism, despite the fact that it was Cruise who killed her husband and made her a widow and her children orphans. She gave up valuable resources, much time, and control of her life in taking up the open-ended commitment to nurse Cruise back to health. Just as the Samaritan had done for the Jewish victim of a mugging on the Jericho road.

I'm not sure about the character played by Cruise, whether he minded being tended by the widow of his enemy, but I'm fairly comfortable in saying that the Jewish mugging victim would have felt uncomfortable at best at being cared for by one of those detestable Samaritans. I suspect that, in the movie, the widow had little choice in treating Cruise's character, but in the story Jesus told, the Samaritan freely took care of the victim. This caring shows us much about the nature of love.

Now the English language is a funny thing. It has many words, and yet there exists a poverty within the language. There are four Greek words that get translated into the English word love. They are storge, philia, eros, and agape. Christian author C.S. Lewis wrote a little book titled, *The Four Loves*. In it he translates those words for us. Storge is the love we would know as affection, especially the affection that is held between parent and child. Philia is the love we would know as brotherly love and is the root word in the name of the city Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. Eros is the love we would know as erotic love. And Agape is the self emptying love that we identify as the love that God

holds for all of creation. This last love is the love that the widow displays to Cruise's character in the movie, or that the Samaritan displays to the victim in the parable. It is a love that loves without expectation, without counting the cost or considering the risk. It is a love that does not calculate debt or demand repayment.

For the last two hundred years a large part of the church, the Body of Christ, at least in the West, has focused strongly on salvation. That is to say that the church has focused on saving and serving the lost. Saving the lost creates a dualism, there are those who are found, us, and those who are lost, them. We are on a different level than they are, and therefore we tend to judge them. When we extend the offer of assistance, we do so with certain expectations of what they will do with it. We put limits and conditions on what we offer. This is not what the Samaritan did, because this is not love.

Love is not about anything other than relationship, and relationships are about sharing. Loving dismisses judgmentalism. Loving moves beyond conditions and limitations. Loving does not place expectations on others. This is precisely how God is with us. God's love for us never stops to count the cost or evaluate the risks involved.

So here's the question: if we can acknowledge the sacred in our life and in the lives of others, and if we can grasp God's word of grace to us and to all, then how can we act towards one another other than as God acts towards us? How can we treat one another with anything less than agape love; even those who are different than us, even those we don't like, even those who don't like us?

Go, and love every life you meet, for every life you meet is your neighbour.