**LOVING GENEROUSLY**

**1-2-A**

**Loving Generously Series**

November 6, 2016

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

⧫John 13:34 ⧫ Romans 12:10 ⧫ Romans 12:16 ⧫ Romans 14:13 ⧫ Galatians 5:13 ⧫ Ephesians 4:2 ⧫ Ephesians 4:32 ⧫ Ephesians 5:19 ⧫ Colossians 3:16 ⧫ 1 Thessalonians 5:11 ⧫ Hebrews 10:24 ⧫ James 4:11 ⧫ 1 Peter 4:8 ⧫ Romans 12:16 ⧫ 1 Peter 4:9 ⧫ 1 Peter 5:5 ⧫ 1 John 4:12 ⧫

Lectionary Passages

**Haggai 1:15b-2:9**

Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Luke 20:27-38

All Saints Day Texts

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18

Psalm 149

Ephesians 1:11-23

Luke 6:20-31

**1 John 4:7-28**

**John 13:34-35**

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ho knows where our minds might be this morning? Thinking about Navy beating Notre Dame yesterday? Still enjoying the sounds of joy and anguish over the World Series, but grateful for a respite from stump speeches and endless news reporting about presidential candidates? Still trying to make up your mind about how you will vote on Tuesday?

In a few minutes, we’ll ask you to make a commitment for 2017. Some here have already done that having mailed or dropped off their commitment card or gone on line to our church’s website to do so. If so, we don’t want to let you off the hook. We ask you to put your name on one side of the card that you find in your bulletin (or use another piece of paper, like an envelope you can find in the pew rack) and jot down one way that you would like to show the love of Jesus in 2017. It might be through the church like being a table parent at LOGOS or singing in the choir, or helping with a memorial reception. It might be something unique by standing at the end of the driveway with coffee and donuts for the people who ride those big trucks and pick up your trash.

Yes, it is OK to let your mind wander a bit during this message and put something down that will indicate how in 2017 you intend to Love Generously.

**1-2A -**Loving Generously has been our Fall Emphasis this year. Within that theme has been our stewardship of time, energy, money. We have explored the stewardship of our gratitude, our work, our belief, our enjoyment of creation, our promises, and our giving. But perhaps more than anything we are to practice good stewardship of our love. If everyone was more loving, our world would surely be a better place and we suspect that resources of time, talent, treasure would be plentiful, too.

Some of us here at First Presbyterian Church have been watching a video series at the church that was produced by the ReImagine Group of Remedia Corporation in Texas. We have been following the Donovan family who live in a lovely gated community, but who have found their hearts while working at a soup kitchen in the city.

The neighbors in this gated community have not been very welcoming of the friends that Frank and Cassie Donovan made at the kitchen. Julia, a former prostitute and Thomas a young man who is blind met at the soup kitchen and fell in love. Frank and Cassie offered them their guest house that is on their property as temporary shelter and eventually host their wedding which was held in the Donovan family’s back yard. Toward the end of the series they renamed their guest house 1-2-A, which was shorthand for “One to Another.” They realized that being faithful to Jesus Christ would demand radical discipleship on their part for Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love One Another.” Jesus didn’t say, “It would be nice if you considered loving one another,” but of all the commands in scripture, including the famous 10 we sometimes examine as a standard for our behavior, this is the most important. It is what distinguishes us as followers of Jesus Christ.

“One another” and loving one another shows up about 90 times one way or another in the Bible. We have listed them in the bulletin again today.

A new command I give you: **Love** **ONE ANOTHER**

Be devoted to **ONE ANOTHER** in brotherly **Love**

Live in harmony with **ONE ANOTHER**

Let us stop passing judgment on **ONE ANOTHER**

Serve **ONE ANOTHER** in **Love**

Bearing with **ONE ANOTHER** in **Love**

Be kind and compassionate to **ONE ANOTHER**

Speak to **ONE ANOTHER** with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs

Submit to **ONE ANOTHER** out of reverence for Christ

Admonish **ONE ANOTHER** with all wisdom

Encourage **ONE ANOTHER**

Spur **ONE ANOTHER** on toward **Love**

Do not slander **ONE ANOTHER**

**Love ONE ANOTHER** deeply from the heart

Live in harmony with **ONE ANOTHER**

Offer hospitality to **ONE ANOTHER**

Clothe yourselves with humility toward **ONE ANOTHER**

**Love** **ONE ANOTHER** as he commanded us

Dear friends, let us **Love ONE ANOTHER**

If we **Love** **ONE ANOTHER**, God lives in us[[1]](#footnote-1)

I learned from a great pastor, J. Vernon McGee about a piece of wood that he keeps on his desk. He took this piece of wood from a vineyard in the San Joaquin Valley. It is a section of vine out of which grows a branch. The owner of the vineyard told him that if two people were in a tug of war using this section of the vine, it would break. However, it wouldn’t break where the vine and branch are joined together for that is the strongest point of the vine. A vine, says Dr. McGee, is different from a tree. If you pull on a branch that goes into a tree it will break at the trunk of the tree--in a tree that is the weakest place. But in a grapevine, that is the strongest point--where the branch is joined to the vine.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Yes, we can be good people on our own, but we are strongest when we live in the vine, when we are a part of the body of Christ.

During the last days of his administration, former President Ronald Reagan told a story about Alexander Dumas. It seems that Dumas and a friend had a severe argument. The matter got so out of hand that one challenged the other to a duel. Both Dumas and his friend were superb marksmen. Fearing that both men might fall in such a duel they resolved to draw straws instead. Whoever drew the shorter straw would then be pledged to shoot himself.

Dumas was the unlucky one. He drew the short straw. With a heavy sigh, he picked up his pistol and trudged into the library and closed the door, leaving the company of friends who had gathered to witness the non-duel outside. In a few moments, a solitary shot was fired. All the curious pressed into the library. They found Dumas standing with his pistol still smoking. "An amazing thing just happened," said Dumas. "I missed."

I am amazed how many of us have been in the church all our lives and still have missed the some of the most central parts of The Gospel. Some of us get stuck in portions of the Old Testament, bound by legalisms, restricted by the "Thou shalt nots" without being empowered by "Thou shalts." Some are experts at the Ten Commandments, but absolute failures at the eleventh and most important of all.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."

THIS IS WHAT CHRIST MOST DESIRES OUT OF US. We may tithe. We may teach Sunday School. We may sing in the choir, serve on one of the boards of our church, help with RAIHN, and do many wonderful things. But if we do not love, we have missed the Gospel.

Lucy stands with her arms folded and a resolute expression on her face, while Charlie Brown pleads, "Lucy, you MUST be more loving. This world needs love. You have to let yourself love to make this world a better place in which to live!"

Lucy whirls around angrily causing Charlie Brown to do a backwards flip and screams at him: "Look, block-head I love the world! It’s people I can’t stand.”

Some of us resemble that remark. Love who? Why everybody. Nothing could be clearer from the Gospels than this. Could a Jew love a Palestinian? Well, I suspect that if Jesus were telling the story of the Good Samaritan today it would be the story of the Good Palestinian. Those are some far limits, are they not?

We are to love not only our immediate neighbors but also the cashier who checks our groceries and the policeman who stops us on the freeway as well as the obnoxious people who cross our paths every day. We are to put our faith into action through loving deeds. As someone has said, "We are judged by our actions, not our intentions. We may have a heart of gold-but so does a hard-boiled egg.

If you took all the psychology texts, boiled them down to their essential truths and from that extensive effort sought to produce one statement about the character of humanity that would be the most profound statement ever uttered, you could not improve on this simple statement. "As I have loved you, love also one another."

Most authorities tell us that we learn to love by being loved. Just as the abused child may become an abuser, a loved child learns to express affection. Harlow demonstrated that love is a learned phenomenon years ago in an experiment to which many first-year psychology student are exposed. He used baby monkeys and artificial mothers constructed out of wire and cloth. He discovered that baby monkeys deprived of a mother’s love found it difficult to love themselves. Subsequent studies have generalized this result to people: we love because

we are loved.

Our love for one another is our primary witness to the world. Jesus said, "By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." Educator Jeffery Holland tells about a preschool teacher who faced what she thought was "burnout." Mary was a committed teacher whose heart particularly went out to children she described privately as "disadvantaged." She had begun to despair over some of the children who seemed so lost, so limited-and in some cases, so neglected at home. In her growing frustration, she vacillated between the feeling that there was something wrong with her, or that there was something wrong with "this current crop of preschoolers. They just don’t respond like they used to." Then her mother died.

It was necessary for Mary to take a week off from her teaching duties to attend her mother’s funeral. She was very close to her Mom. Following the funeral, she needed some time alone to deal with her feelings. Her frustrations at preschool seemed like an even heavier burden at this point in her life. After a weekend of aimless shopping, puttering in the garden and watching TV, she realized she should return to her classroom.

Mary felt more like a soldier going into battle than a teacher of preschoolers. The first day back was about what she expected. Her hurt and despair produced resentment which she kept carefully hidden. She went through the paces like the competent professional she was. She smiled at the right times and was admirably patient considering the environment and her raw feelings. But then it happened.

She had come around the corner to discover Rachel picking the last chrysanthemum from the pot in the hall. Rachel, by the way, was the most distant, most disruptive child in her class. In a stern, trembling voice Mary demanded, "Rachel, what are you doing?"

Rachel held out in her little hand the flowers she had already picked. "Mrs.

Terrell," she said, "You used to be like a mother now you always seem angry. Would these flowers help you to be like a mother again?”

Mary Terrell thought, “Always seem angry? You mean it shows? To a five-year-old? She stammered out a question: "Rachel, what is a mother like?"

"A mother is like you used to be," Rachel said. "A mother likes being with children."

"But Rachel," said Mrs. Terrell, "I like being with children. I’ve just...well, Rachel, my mother...passed away, and..."

Rachel meekly interrupted, "You mean she died?"

"Yes, Rachel," said her teacher sadly, "She died."

Rachel looked up at her teacher and asked, "Did she live until she died?"

Mary Terrell thought, what kind of question is that? "Well, honey, of course," she said, "All people live until they die; they..."

Rachel interrupted her again. "Oh, no they don’t, Mrs. Terrell. Some people seem to die while they are still walking around. They stop being what they used to be. Mrs. Terrell, don’t die just because your mother did. Be alive while you are alive."

Out of the mouths of babes.

How do we witness to the world that Christ is alive? We do it by being alive ourselves. How do we witness to the world that God is love? Generously we show the world a different way. We do it by loving one another.

**Thoughts and Commentary on 1 John 4 and the Command of Jesus in the Gospel of John in Chapter 13**

Like much of the epistle of 1 John, 1 John 4 focuses heavily on the concept of the love of God and the implications of that love for the Johannine community to whom the epistle is directed. The author of the epistle opens this section in 4:7 by directly addressing his audience as "beloved," a term of endearment which he frequently employs throughout the epistle (2:7, 3:2, 3:21, 4:1, 4:11). This term foreshadows the key theme of the passage: love. In fact, the author suggests that one test for the true knowledge of God is one's ability to love: "everyone who loves ... knows God." The suggestion that love leads to the knowledge of God would stand in opposition to Gnosticizing tendencies which would claim that that knowledge of God can only come through the acquisition of secret information.

Unlike such gnostic notions, the author of the epistle in verse 8 openly shares with his audience the essence of the divine, namely, love. This clear statement, "God is love," is similar to the author's earlier distinct statement in 1:5 that "God is light." In both cases, it seems that rather than trying to provide an all-encompassing definition of God, the author is rather hinting at only certain attributes of God. Nonetheless, the definitive statement that God is love serves to undergird much of the text that follows, including the exposition of God's love in verse 9 in which the author suggests that God's sending of his son serves as a proof of his love. The notion of the son being the "only" () son is a familiar one to readers of the gospel of John, where the same term is frequently used as a descriptor of Jesus (1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18). The author of the epistle goes on in verse 10 to specify just what sort of role this only son played: that of an "atoning sacrifice" (). The usage of this word here and in 2:2 of the epistle are the only times the word appears in the NT.

In verse 11, the author repeats his pet name for the epistle's audience, "beloved." As in verse 7, the author issues the imperative for his audience to love one another. The author reassures his audience that despite the fact that neither they, nor anyone else, has ever seen God, by loving one another they guarantee the in-dwelling of God in their midst. Furthermore, this mutual love allows for the perfection or completion of God's love. The notion that God's love might be perfected has led some commentators on this text to be nervous that it could imply that God's love was ever "imperfect." However, the word used here () often refers more to an expected end or fulfillment than a "perfection" per se. In the gospel of John, for example, the same verb is used to refer to the fulfillment of Scripture (19:28). Thus, the use of this word here need not imply any imperfection in God's love, but rather a fulfillment of it.

The first part of verse 13 opens with the phrase "by this we know we abide in him ...." However, it is not entirely clear whether the "this" referenced here refers to what precedes it (God living and perfecting love in us) or to what follows (God's giving from his Spirit). This ambiguity, however, does not matter insofar as the author's message remains clear: God abides in those who love. In verse 15, the author further clarifies that God also abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God. One may wonder whether this indicates a rift between the Johannine community and other communities in which such a confession was deemed unnecessary or inaccurate.

Verse 17 introduces an element of eschatology with the mention of the "day of judgment." Although the theme of judgment is a relatively frequent one in the gospel of John (5:22-30, 7:24, 8:16, 12:31), it seems rather misplaced in this epistle of John in which love, not judgment, serves as a central focus. Nonetheless, the first part of this verse connects it well with the theme of the completion or perfection of God's love, which was already explored in verse 12 of this chapter as well as earlier in the epistle in 2:5. The author of the epistle explores this connection between eschatological judgment and love further in verse 18 as he explains that perfect/complete love has nothing to do with fear or punishment. The term used for punishment here () is a rare one in the NT and only otherwise appears in Matthew 25:46. The context in Matthew suggests that the punishment envisioned is of the eternal variety. Thus, it seems likely that even though the author of the epistle does not specify that the punishment he is referencing is eternal in nature, based on the context of this word's usage in Matthew, it may not be too much of a stretch to assume that the author is referring to eternal punishment here.

Verse 19 presents the translator with a difficulty as the verb "love" () could either be translated as an indicative verb ("we love," as in the NRSV and many other English translations) or as a hortatory subjunctive ("let us love"). The former translation implies a cause-and-effect relationship between God's love and human love. The latter adopts the familiar imperative to love, which was already issued in verse 7. Because either translation could plausibly fit well here, it is difficult to decide which the author intended. Nonetheless, regardless of which translation is chosen, the author's basic point remains the same: that there is a close connection between human and divine love.

Lastly in thinking about chapter 4 we turn to verse 20. Here the author presents the upshot of all of this discussion on love by means of an a minore ad maius argument. If the Christians who are his audience are not able to love humans who they can see, the author asks, how could they possibly be able to love God who, as has been shown in verse 12, is unseen? Thus, the author convincingly cinches his argument for the necessity of reciprocal love within the Johannine Christian community.

John 13:34-35 is at the beginning of what is commonly known as “The Farewell Discourse.” Following a long tradition of leaders making speeches at the close of their ministry, Jesus prepares his disciples for the things that are about to come. Throughout John 13–17, Jesus shows in actions and in speech those things he finds most important to convey to the disciples. Discipleship, loving one another, friendship and Christ’s departure come in and out of focus — and in and out of relationship to the other terms. Although Christ is departing, through the disciples’ love for Christ he will be manifest to them (14:21). Their love is shown by their keeping his commandment (14:15, 21). Likewise, their true status as friends is dependent on their doing what he commands (15:14). But they have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit and to abide in Christ (15:16).

John 13:34-35 specifically highlights Christ’s departure and his command to love one another.. The passage is framed by the failures of two of Jesus’ 12 disciples. And it is within this setting of betrayal on one end and denial on the other that Jesus gives his command to love. “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (v. 34).

Jesus prefaces this commandment to love with an announcement of his glorification and departure. These are set together to help interpret each other: Jesus’ glorification is coming in the sacrifice he is about to make, and his departure is part of his glorification. God and the Son of Man’s glory are directly linked: It is through Christ’s glorifying God that Christ’s own reciprocal glory will come. And what has been the signal of Christ’s glorification? It is, in fact, the departure of Judas that acts as the marker into this stage of glorification: “Now the Son of Man has been glorified” (italics added).

We might assume that the commandment to love is meant to comfort the disciples. After all in the preceding verses he has just announced that he will be leaving them. He is saying to them that despite the loss of their Lord, they will have Christ’s love extended by each other. Yet Christ goes on to give another reason for his command: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (v. 35). It isn’t merely as a source of comfort that they are to love one another. Jesus’ command to love one another is to be a witness to others, to all people. It is a marker of a disciple of Christ, that they love each other.

John 15:12-17 is an interesting parallel to 13:34-35 and helps serve to interpret it. Jesus begins with the same injunction: “love one another as I have loved you” (15:12). This time Jesus continues with the poignant words “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (15:13). Once again, Jesus is alluding to his death. Once again, Jesus is holding himself up as the model of what love and friendship are. And he calls his disciples “friends” at first on the condition that they do what he commands (15:14). Yet directly after, he declares that they are indeed friends, and that they were chosen that they might bear fruit — and abiding fruit at that (15:16). While their status as friends is contingent on doing what Christ commands — that is, love one another — they’re also given an assurance that they will be able to do that which he commands.
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1. **LOVING GENEROUSLY IS SOMETHING WE ARE ASKED TO DO AS OUR WORSHIP OF GOD AND WE DO IT ESPECIALLY AS WE GIVE OURSELVES ONE TO ANOTHER.**

John 13:34 ⧫ Romans 12:10 ⧫ Romans 12:16 ⧫ Romans 14:13 ⧫ Galatians 5:13 ⧫ Ephesians 4:2 ⧫ Ephesians 4:32 ⧫ Ephesians 5:19 ⧫ Colossians 3:16 ⧫ 1 Thessalonians 5:11 ⧫ Hebrews 10:24 ⧫ James 4:11 ⧫ 1 Peter 4:8 ⧫ Romans 12:16 ⧫ 1 Peter 4:9 ⧫ 1 Peter 5:5 ⧫ 1 John 4:12 ⧫ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *The Best of J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)