

YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE

JOHN 3:14-21

LETHBRIDGE MENNONITE CHURCH

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MARCH 11, 2018/4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

Yesterday, I asked Nicholas if he had any sermon advice for me on a Sunday when his friends from school are here.

“I dunno, can you do one in thirty seconds?”

That’s what kids are for, right? To keep us humble... ☺

Well, I can’t do thirty seconds, but I’m going to try to do 10 minutes.

As you’ve heard this morning, it’s been a chaotic few days in the life of our church.

- We’re finishing off a renovation project that’s been ongoing for a few months now, which you walked through on your way in
- We were preparing to welcome the RJC choir this morning
- We were making further plans to host our provincial AGM next weekend
- On a personal level, this weekend has also been filled up with officiating at Naomi’s sister’s wedding
- Then, we discovered the water break on Friday; and by “we,” I mean, “Doug Wiebe, who was dropping off cookies for next week’s Lenten lunch” (thanks so much to all who have been helping with this)

So, it’s all felt a little crazy to me over these last few weeks. Likely to you, too. Maybe you’re growing tired of walking over plywood and into a construction zone to church each week.

Maybe the thought of another few weeks of disruption doesn't sound very appealing to you.

I got an email from Phil yesterday that sounded altogether too cheery given my frame of mind, and said something like, "Well, we finish off one construction project, I guess we'll start another one."

As I was driving in to the church this morning, I thought, "Isn't that how life often feels? Isn't that how *faith* often feels?"

Just when we think we're making some progress, getting some things done, crossing some things off the list, when something happens and we feel like we're right back where we started. Or in the middle of some new challenge that we didn't see coming and don't feel remotely prepared for!

In faith and life, as in the trials and travails of buildings, challenges don't conveniently give you warning when they're about to arrive.

It's in moments like these that I find it helpful to kind of get back to the basics.

First, the church.

A few times over the last few weeks I'll admit to feeling frustrated at living and worshiping in a construction zone. I think it was two Sundays ago, I showed up at church and it was windy and icy and tough to get in... there were disposable coffee cups and garbage all over the parking lot... there was dust in the foyer... a few things in the sanctuary weren't where they were supposed to be... And I sort of just sighed at the state of the church.

I probably looked like Jonah sitting and pouting under his pathetic little plant. 😊

I felt a similar twinge when I walked in the door this morning and heard the lovely humming sound of the dehumidifying fans that have accompanied our worship this morning " and when I had a look at the basement. 😊

But then, God reminded me of something pretty basic.

The church is not a building, whether gleaming and new or in the process of renovation or under repair. The church is people. It is people who are walking the way of Jesus together.

And I thought back to just the last few days of my inbox.

- people rallying in less than an hour to offer assistance to Dennis and Helen while she had her surgery yesterday
- another email basically saying, "Stop sending food, we have enough!"
- people filling my inbox with, "how can I help" messages once they heard about the water issues
- people wrestling together with the question of how best to care for one of our aging saints who is struggling
- people reaching out to our sisters and brother from Coaldale to see if they would let us use their building next Saturday for part of the AGM next weekend
- people scrambling to reconfigure lunch plans because they're excited to welcome a choir from Saskatchewan this morning.
- people offering to open their homes and their hearts in expressions of hospitality this weekend and next weekend to welcome guests from afar

People, people, people.

This is the church. People doing their best to love and support and care for and encourage one another and build each other up as an expression of shared devotion to Christ.

Then my thoughts moved from the basics of church to the basics of faith.

Our gospel text this morning is probably among the most well known in the entire Bible.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

But it's one that I think we often interpret badly.

We reduce God to a formula about afterlife management:

- God loves you and sent Jesus to die for your sins

- If you believe this you'll go to heaven
- If you don't you'll be condemned

And we reduce human beings to information processors:

- believe the right things in your head, get the prize at the end of your life

This is too small a view of God, and it's a too small a view of ourselves.

One of the most basic truths in all of Scripture, I think, is that we are what we love. Or we *become* like what we love.

Our text today ends with these words:

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light...

John doesn't say, *Light has come into the world, but people **believed** in darkness instead of light?*

No, he says people *loved* darkness.

The reason the light is rejected is not simply because a bunch of stuff about what Jesus said or did or taught or modeled is or isn't believable; it's because human beings *love* wrongly.

I've told this story before, but I had a friend in graduate school who once told me, "Don't tell me what you believe. Let me follow you around for a week. Let me pay attention to what you do and how you do it, what you give priority to, how you spend your time, how you treat others. Let me follow you around for a week and then I'll tell you what you believe."

In other words, "let me see what and how you love."

Every Monday morning over the past few months, I visit the jail for a support group with a bunch of guys who have spent a lifetime loving the wrong things in the wrong ways, and who are seeking to love better.

We begin each session with a prayer that ends with these words:

We pray all of these things in the name of your son Jesus, who had the guts to love...

It takes guts to love. More specifically, it takes guts to love *rightly*. To love the right things in the right way for the right reasons.

I want to end with four points for those of us who seek to love better—who seek to love the light and to come to believe in the God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son:

1. **Love what Jesus loves**—the world. Your neighbour. Your enemies. Yourself.
2. **Love the way that Jesus loves**—at cost to yourself. With compassion. With truth.
3. **Love the things that Jesus did**—the things he taught, the death he died for me and for you, the defeat of death, the promise of new creation.
4. **Love in response to/participation in the love that created and holds the world**— the love that redeemed the world, and the love through which the world will be made new.

It takes guts to love this way. It takes guts to love the right things for the right reasons.

But this is the path to the right kind of life—not just off in some distant afterlife, but here and now.

And if we can be people who are seeking to love rightly, we will become people whose lives and characters and responses in the world are shaped by this love.

People who are able to say, “I believe in you, Lord Jesus Christ. With my head and my heart, with my hands and my feet. With all of who I am. I believe in you because your love has become my love.”

I leave you with these words that come not from the gospel of John but from the letters John wrote later. I John 1:16-19:

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us.

This is the most basic truth of the Christian faith. And it is the most beautiful one, too.

May God help us to love well in response to the love that has been shown to us in Christ.

Amen.

