

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

June 20, 2010

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

I Samuel 16:1-13
Matthew 22:34-40

Auction Sermon

Loving with the Eyes of God

The story of Samuel's search for the one who would become king of Israel is set in circumstances that occurred over twenty five hundred years ago. But the lesson it teaches, however, is as fresh as the day God told Samuel what was missing in his perception.

Samuel was sad because God was going to take the throne away from Saul. Samuel's attachment to Saul and his clinging to what he wanted instead of what God wanted brought about a kind of darkness to his spirit. But then when God sent him to the home of Jesse in Bethlehem to anoint the next king of Israel, something surprising happened.

As it turns out, you can't judge a book by its cover - or outward appearances can be deceiving. God had told Samuel that he would show him which son of Jesse would become king and when Samuel laid eyes on the impressive Eliab, he thought, "This is the new king for sure!"

God's response to Samuel is classic and points out a spiritual blindness that Samuel has. And that, if we're honest, we have some of the time as well.

"... the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." [v.7]

God does not see things the way we see things! And even if we could see into peoples' hearts, still the fact remains that God sees all kinds of things differently than we do.

Jesus himself was misjudged and misunderstood all the time. He bumped up against the accepted understanding of the law and peoples' narrow interpretation of how it should be applied all the time. The religious officials of the day were constantly looking for opportunities to catch Jesus breaking the law as they saw it.

And the law meant the Ten Commandments and the other 613 laws in the first few books of our Bible. In Matthew when the Pharisees question Jesus about the greatest commandment, trying to get him to say something wrong, they are definitely NOT seeing things with the eyes or heart of God. But Jesus is, and he gives us the best summary of the laws there is.

Love God....

Love others....

But this love is Christian love, which is not the same as the love that people instinctively have for each other. This love requires God's glasses.

Because to love your neighbor as yourself does not mean that you must have a cozy, warm feeling in your heart toward those who have inflicted the greatest pain on you or on your loved one. God knows that feeling of love is sometimes simply not possible.

What the Ten Commandments and Jesus both are talking about is not love the feeling but love the action. The action of love is what he's talking about - letting go of the hatred, letting go of the bitterness, letting go of self-righteousness – all the things that get between us in our human relationships and in our relationship with the Lord.

The Old Testament gives us many examples of other actions of love, both in the Ten Commandments and elsewhere:

- Don't steal.
- Don't deal falsely with each other.
- Don't lie to one another.
- Don't dislike people who are deaf or put obstacles before the blind.
- Don't hate in your heart anyone of your kin.
- Don't take vengeance out against any of your people.

These are the actions of love. They do not condone the wrongs of someone else. But they prevent those wrongs from eating you alive. It's also good to remember that sometimes these actions of love take time.

Jesus doesn't give his summary of the commandments to force anyone into the actions of love. Rather this command to love your neighbor as yourself is given as a gift, because our all-knowing and all-loving God knows that this is the only way to true joy and true happiness and peace. To let go of the anger, to let go of the bitterness, to let go of the self-righteousness does not right the wrongs that have been done but is the door God has opened for joy and for peace in your life.

To love as Jesus wants us to love – both God and people – requires seeing with God's eyes, or putting on our God glasses so we can see others as God sees them. So we can see past rough edges and into vulnerable hearts.

It's easy to miss the significance of a person to God because they are not significant to the world around us. We might miss the joy of a child's capacity for play and laughter because we are engrossed in "important" things. We watch the evening news and read the newspaper and somehow do not see the abject poverty and desperate conditions of much of the human family.

What does it look like to love others with the eyes of God? This week I ran across kids' definitions of love. They're wonderful and they're right on.

"When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love." (Rebecca - age 8)

"When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth." (Billy - age 4)

"Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen." (Bobby - age 5)

"If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend whom you hate."
(Nikka - age 6)

"Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, and then he wears it every day."
(Noelle - age 7)

"Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well." (Tommy - age 6)

And one last one:

"You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget." (Jessica - age 8)

Indeed people forget:

Our job as ones who are made in God's image

Our calling as ones who have been chosen by God to be part of his family

Our duty and our privilege as ones who are followers of Jesus

is to remind others of what love is like.

By word and by action. By doing what Jesus did and believing what Jesus believed.
Jesus loved God - and he loved the world around him and everyone in it.

And so he came among us as a servant rather than as a master,

- As one who forgives and heals rather than as one who judges and destroys,
- As one who made himself poor so that others might be made rich,
- As one who was obedient to God - even when obedience meant he would suffer and die.

We know that God first loved us. And that God is with us even now to fulfill all his promises.

So put on your God glasses and see those around you as God sees them.

Remind one another of what Christian love is like.

And love one another as Christ loves you.

Amen.