

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

May 3, 2015

“Love Your Brothers And Sisters”



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister
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Ginny Sherwood: Lay Reader

Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

1 John 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4:20-21,

Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

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Love Your Brothers and Sisters

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A website features letters to pastors from children. One says: "Dear Pastor, My mother is very religious. She goes to church every week, even if she has a cold, to play bingo. Annette. Age 9." Another one says: "Dear Pastor, I would like to go to heaven someday because I know my brother won't be there. Stephen. Age 8." And then there's this: "Dear Pastor, I know God loves everybody but He never met my sister. Arnold. Age 8."

Love your brothers and sisters. That's what I want to talk with you about today. Love your brothers and sisters. Whether you're a brother or a sister. Love your brothers and sisters. Whether you're a child or an adult. Love your brothers and sisters. Whether you come from a family of five or a family of fifteen. Love your brothers and sisters. Say to those around you: Love your brothers and sisters. Love your brothers and sisters. Love your brothers and sisters.

The Bible wants people to love their brothers and sisters. It says you can't love God and hate your brothers and sisters. Because how can you love God, whom you've not seen, but you can't love your brother or sister, whom you have seen? It makes no sense. If you love God you also have to love your brother and sister.

When the Bible says here, "brothers and sisters," it's talking about a broader view than just our own siblings. I believe it's referring to all of humankind. That's who God calls us to love. Not just our own brothers and sisters, but all of our brothers and sisters. All around the world.

I drove to L.A. this past week to see a minister friend of mine. Kathleen came along to navigate, to get a haircut, and so I could drive in the HOV lane. My minister friend asked me, "Are you getting enough self-care?" By that he meant, how are you nourishing your soul? I told him I meditate, I study the Bible, I pray, I walk, I read, and I preach. This nourishes my soul: preaching and being with you every Sunday. That's how I get self-care and that's how I nourish my soul.

We have to love and care for ourselves before we can love and care for others. That's not narcissism or selfishness or self-centeredness. It's reality. Before you can love your brothers and sisters, you first have to love yourself. It's like on an airplane where the flight attendants tell you if the oxygen mask comes down in front of you; put one on yourself, before you put one on your child. You have to love and take care of yourself first. Or you'll be no good to others.

A lawyer asked Jesus: Which is the greatest commandment? Jesus said: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. That's the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus knows that before you can love God or love your neighbor, you first have to love yourself. Forgive yourself. Be kind to yourself. It's like the song Whitney Houston sang, "Learning to love yourself, it is the greatest love of all." God knows it's okay to love yourself, without feeling guilty about it, because God knows you can't love God or anyone else, until you love yourself first.

The St. Petersburg Men's Ensemble sang in our church last Sunday afternoon. Lovely. They sang in Russian for the most part. I didn't understand a word of most of what they were singing. I leaned over to Kathleen at one point and said, "I suppose they could be singing 'Death to America' for all I know." I think she shushed me. I don't think they were singing anything bad! It was a delightful concert.

This cross-cultural concert gave us - Russians and Americans - a chance to recognize that we are all one. That we are all brothers and sisters. And that we should love our brothers and sisters, regardless of where they were born.

The Bible says why we are supposed to love each other. Because love is from God. So, everyone who loves is a part of God and everyone who does not love is not a part of God, for God is love.

God is love. God is love. God is love. I believe those are the three most important words in the Bible. Now some might argue that the three most important words in the Bible are, "He is risen." Okay. But even those words and that action came about because: God is love. And I have to be honest, I don't know how anyone can read the Bible from cover to cover and not come away believing: God is love. I know some people miss it. They come away believing: God is hate, or God is wrath, or God is revenge. No. God is love. God is love. God is love. And we are

to love our brothers and sisters, the way God loves us.

My wife, Kathleen, has three sisters. Kathleen is the oldest. She's like the mother hen of sisters. She's always calling her sisters, praying for them, and visiting them whenever she can. Kathleen is a living example of the admonition to love your sisters. And I have no doubt that if she had brothers, she would love her brothers, too. Loving your actual brothers and sisters is part of the Bible's instruction to love your brothers and sisters. I know there are some people who don't want to hear that. They've had a Hatfield and McCoy type feud going on with their brothers and sisters for quite a while. So I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but if you want to follow the Good News, then you have to love your actual brothers and sisters.

Jesus was speaking to the crowds one day, when his mother and brothers show up and want to talk with him. Someone told him that, that his mother and brothers have shown up and want to talk with him. Then Jesus says: Who is my mother and who are my brothers? Then he points to his disciples and says: These are my mother and brothers. And then he says: Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.

I always thought Jesus was dissing his family in this story. It seemed to me Jesus was saying: I don't have time for my family or I have more important things to do than talk to my family or I wish my family would stop bothering me. Now, I don't believe that. Now, I believe that Jesus was saying: Everyone is my brother and sister and mother and father and aunt and uncle and cousin. I believe Jesus was saying: I not only care about my actual brothers and sisters, I care about all people, because all people are my brothers and sisters.

At our Blessing of the Animals event a couple weeks ago, a woman came and had me bless her dog. She told me she'd had

her dog blessed at another church once before, but she couldn't remember which church. Knowing that Catholic churches sometimes bless animals, I said, "Was it at a Catholic church?" She said, "Oh no, we're Lutherans." (I think she meant her dog is a Lutheran, too.)

You can't just love your fellow Lutherans as your brothers and sisters. You also have to love your fellow Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, and yes, even Catholics. I was trying to demonstrate that with my interfaith installation service a few weeks ago, where we had a Rabbi, an Imam, a Mormon, a Methodist, and a New Thought minister taking part in the service. I was trying to show that we are all one. And that we are all to love each other, whatever our faith or philosophy, because we are all brothers and sisters.

Jesus commands that we love each other. Jesus says: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

Jesus was telling his disciples and us: Not to only love each other, nor to only love other Christians, but to love everyone. Jesus was telling his disciples and us: Love your brothers and sisters, because everyone is your brother and sister.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to love our brothers and sisters.
Help us to love everyone.
And help us to know that everyone means everyone.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*



God
is still
speaking,

Never place a
period, where God
has placed a comma.

Grace Allen

THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism