

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

November 15, 2015

“Provoke Love, Not A Fight”



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Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

Mark 13:7-8

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Hebrews 10:23-25

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Provoke Love, Not A Fight

True love is what most of us are looking for. And some of us have been blessed enough to have found it. But not everyone is looking for true love.

Sam and Dave were walking to town on a Saturday night, hoping to find a couple of young ladies to have some fun with. As they passed a church, Sam said, "Dave, I need to go in here for a moment." So Sam went into the church and then he went into the confessional. Sam said, "Father, forgive me for I have sinned. I've had a little fun with a couple of young ladies. But, Father, they didn't mind at all." The priest was indignant. The priest said, "Was it Colleen Jones?" Sam said, "No, Father, it wasn't Colleen Jones." The priest said, "Was it Rebecca Smith?" Sam said, "No, Father, it wasn't Rebecca Smith." The priest then told Sam to say 30 Hail Mary's and be on his way. When Sam got outside, Dave said, "How'd it go?" Sam said, "Great! I got a couple prospects for us. You call on Colleen Jones and I'll call on Rebecca Smith."

Christmas is coming. Which means complaints about the “War on Christmas” are coming, too. In fact, they’re already here. Some Christians are complaining that Starbucks has started a “War on Christmas” by putting out plain seasonal red cups, rather than, like the past, when Starbucks put out cups with drawings of snowmen and ornaments on them. You know, just like the kind Mary drew on Jesus’ cups when he was a kid. Hopefully Christian complaints about a “War on Christmas,” will stop, because the song says, “They will know we are Christians by our love.” The song does not say, “They will know we are Christians by our complaints about a ‘War on Christmas.’”

A bumper sticker proclaims “LOVE.” Aww. How nice. But then a closer look reveals that LOVE is spelled out with a handgun for the “L”, a grenade for the “O”, two rifles for the “V”, and an assault weapon for the “E”. That bumper sticker was as much about love as, well, a handgun, a grenade, two rifles, and an assault weapon are about love.

That bumper sticker seemed like it was hate masquerading as love. (But if somebody here has that bumper sticker on the back of their vehicle and I have it all wrong, please forgive me.)

Why are some people so hateful at times? Maybe they get that idea from the Bible. The Bible does have its fair share of hateful stories.

I never have understood the Book of Revelation. Specifically the idea that Jesus would come back to earth and this time make war on his enemies for a thousand years. How can that be? How can the guy who was all about love, all of a sudden be all about hate? How can the guy who was all about forgiveness, all of a sudden be all about revenge? And how can the guy who was all about peace, all of a sudden be all about war? Now maybe you feel differently about the Book of Revelation. And that’s okay,

because we're a United Church of Christ church. So you're free to think for yourself. And as a United Church of Christ minister, I'm free to think for myself, too.

Jesus is not Rambo in a robe. I know some Christians want to believe in a G-I Joe Jesus, who will one day return to earth and kill all his enemies. But Jesus is the guy who said, "Love your enemies." Jesus is the guy who said, "Forgive and you will be forgiven." And Jesus is the guy who said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Jesus preached love in the face of hate. Jesus preached forgiveness in the face of revenge. And Jesus preached peace in the face of war. Those are some of the reasons why the powers that be killed him 2,000 years ago. And I believe those are some of the reasons why the powers that be would kill him today.

Thankfully the Bible has its fair share of loving stories, too. Like in Hebrews, where it says, "let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds." What a great idea! Especially when we read in the Gospel of Mark, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." And while that was written 2,000 years ago, we see it across the globe today: nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

So how should Christians respond to that today? Like it says in Hebrews, "let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds."

For an example of how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, and not a fight, ironically we turn to war. You may have heard about this.

According to just about everyone's source of information these days, Wikipedia, on December 7, 1914, during the first World War (called the war to end all wars, which, unfortunately, turned

out not to be true), the Pope suggested a temporary truce so there could be a celebration of Christmas. The warring countries refused to create any official cease-fire, but on or around Christmas, the soldiers in the trenches declared their own unofficial truce.

Starting on Christmas Eve, many German and British troops sang Christmas carols to each other across the lines. And on Christmas Day, some German soldiers left their trenches and approached the Allies across no-man's-land, calling out "Merry Christmas" in their enemies' native language. At first, the British soldiers feared it was a trick, but seeing the Germans unarmed, they left their trenches and shook hands with their enemies. The men exchanged presents of cigarettes and other things and sang Christmas carols. They even played a good-natured game of soccer against each other.

What became known as the Christmas Truce of 1914 happened only five months after the outbreak of war in Europe. It never happened again in wartime. Future attempts at holiday ceasefires were quashed by officers' threats of disciplinary action. Still, during World War I, the soldiers on the Western Front proved that not even a world war could destroy the Christmas spirit. And I guess you could say that those troops were able to stop a true... "War on Christmas."

So at least for a brief period of time, back in 1914, those soldiers knew how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.

Members of this congregation demonstrate how to provoke one another to love and good deeds. I won't name them, but if you know their story, you know who they are.

One man, who is a widower now, cared for his wife for many months during her dying days. He was constantly at her bedside

when she was in the hospital. And he was constantly at her bedside when she was at home. And he was there with her, when she transitioned from the here and now, to the hereafter. He personified love and good deeds.

Another man visits his wife several times a week in the care facility where she is, which is many miles from their home. Her mind is slowly going. And yet he still cares for her and he still cares about her. He personifies love and good deeds.

And then there's an elderly couple, who help each other in their various infirmities. When she has problems with her heart, he takes her to the hospital. When he has problems with his mobility, she helps him along. They personify love and good deeds.

The people I mentioned, and others in this congregation, are an inspiration for those who want to provoke one another to love and good deeds.

Poets have been encouraging us to provoke one another to love and good deeds for centuries. They usually write about romantic love. But it can also apply to brotherly love or Christian love. I include among poets, songwriters and singers.

Orleans, a pop-rock group back in the 70s, sang about love in their hit, "Love Takes Time." Orleans sings, "Love takes time. And it's hard to find. You gotta take some time: To let love grow." In other words: Love is like a tree, that grows and grows. Love is like a river, that flows and flows. May you and I help love to grow and to flow.

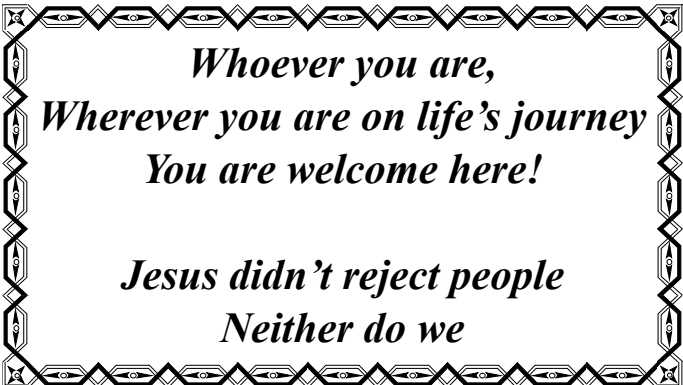
Rumi, a Sufi mystic and poet from 800 years ago, wrote about love in his poem, "Love is the Water of Life." Rumi writes in part, "What is agony of the spirit? To advance toward death

without seizing hold of the Water of Life.” Rumi is saying that love is the Water of Life. And that you and I need the Water of Life - Love - in order to live.

I hope you and I recognize, with Orleans, that love takes time. And I hope you and I are able, with Rumi, to bathe in the Water of Love, to bask in the Water of Love, and to drink in the Water of Love abundantly. And I hope you and I provoke one another to love and good deeds. For all time.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to provoke one another to love and good deeds.
Help us to provoke everyone to love and good deeds.
And help us to know that you love us...
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*



*Whoever you are,
Wherever you are on life's journey
You are welcome here!*

*Jesus didn't reject people
Neither do we*

THE GOLDEN RULE

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

Christianity

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

Judaism

*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