

"Love in Action"

Recently I've been meeting with couples who are preparing for wedding ceremonies later in the year. In one of these sessions, a couple shared with me how they had first met and begun to know one another. As I learned about their story, I decided to throw out a question I often ask wedding couples. "Which of you," I said, "was the first to say to the other, 'I love you'?" Each of them remembered the moment exactly. He said it first and she did not respond right away. In fact, it took her awhile to become confident enough to speak the words herself, "I love you." We talked about all of that and what helped them come to the place where they were certain what they had found in each other was love. It's a question I like to ask couples because it gets at the way in which they start to feel secure enough to be vulnerable enough with each other. Sharing love requires trust. Loving isn't something we enter into lightly. To love another person involves recognizing not only what we receive from them but what we are ready to give to them. Love creates relationship which creates a partnership which means life is no longer a solo act. Because of love, life is lived in deep connection with others. This is the foundation for two people who are ready to give themselves to each other in marriage. The experience of love is also the foundation of our life in the church.

In the church, where we are grounded in faith, love is our way. We've just said it. Love creates relationship. In this case, it's relationship with God which creates partnership with God which means we don't live our lives isolated or alone. We are connected to God who connects us to each other which connects us in service to the world. Our reading this morning calls to mind the commandment Jesus has given. "Love one another as I have loved you." When we think about what matters most in the church, love is at the top of list. There is a place in the writings of scripture where the Apostle Paul teaches about the importance of love. He writes that we can be busy doing all kind of things as the church; we can build buildings, we can participate in worship, we can support missions, we can even have an incredibly successful Annual Garage Sale, but if we do not have love, writes Paul, we are just making noise. In his words, we are just like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (1 Cor. 13:1) The point is, the church is more than just a swirl of activity. The church is more than a place where people say nice sounding words. The church is a place of action where love is the driving force. The mission statement of our congregation is printed on the front of the tri-fold each week. You can see it there, "Responding to the Reality of God." Beneath that statement is the primary action that shapes our response to God. We are "Sharing Christ's Love with Everyone." Let's take the thought of this a little further. The specific ways in which you and I respond to God change depending on the circumstance and the opportunities. Sometimes we pray. Sometimes we participate in worship. Other times we serve together or gather in groups for study and learning. Often we respond to God beyond the walls of the this building, out in the world where we live our lives doing our work or spending time with family. So, there are many ways of responding to God but the reason we respond, what motivates us to keep doing what we do is love. This is what Jesus has commanded. Love connects us to him and it positions us to extend God's grace and peace into the world.

This morning our young people are confirmed in the faith. They have completed a program of learning about the church and what it means to follow Jesus. They've read scripture, studied the church's history, and spent time with mentors who have supported them and helped them come to this day when we affirm how God is working in their lives. This is an important celebration for them. Today is the time when we, as a church family, surround these young people with prayers of encouragement. We publicly recognize that these youth are at a place in life where they are making their own decisions about they believe. In obvious ways, they are the center of our attention this morning. But their Confirmation Sunday is not just about them. In fact, what we want them to know is that today is about God and, specifically, how God is working through them. What we affirm today is their connection to a community shaped by love. Yes, after today they are members of the church. Yes, after today they are connected to our mission and ministries in the fullest way. It's all good. But, what's most true about today is that from now and into the rest of their lives these young people are empowered to be ambassadors of Christ's love in the world. We are with them in this life and we are strengthened with them in this faith.

This past Friday evening the Confirmation Class had their final retreat here at the church. One component of their time together was to break into small groups and rotate through different stations reflecting upon their Confirmation experience. One of those stations involved coming to the Prayer Chapel to visit with me and Pastor Katya. We spoke to the kids one-on-one. It was an opportunity to encourage them as they looked forward to their Confirmation Day. I want to say, these are very busy young people. They have the ongoing demands of the classroom, with high expectations to do well in school. Added to this are commitments to being involved in music or sports of all kinds. They're involved in church and various other special groups. I enjoyed asking them about their lives and what they do to fill up the time. What I didn't ask them, not directly, is whether they live lives of love. And

so today, I'm going to ask that question. When was the first time they expressed their love for God? What are the ways they experience the love of God in their lives? Are they ready to live the way of love in all they do?

Along with their families and as members of this church we have every right to be proud of these young people today but on their Confirmation Sunday let's invite them to focus on what matters most. We love because Christ has first loved us. When we take our place within the church we give ourselves to this mission because it's true. The world will know we are Christians by our love.

What a blessing that God calls us to be the church. There is no other place where we can offer one another the very thing God gives to us in Christ, a love that is our way of life. Amen.