

May 2, 2021

1 John 4: 7-9

Rev. Larry Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

“This Says and Does It All”

There was a time when I thought about taking up the hobby of watching birds. This probably doesn't sound exciting enough for some but I imagined it would be interesting because birds are such curious creatures. There are so many different kinds of birds and their colors, songs, and ways of moving and building nests brings limitless possibilities. So, I checked it out and did some reading on the subject. It turns out there are different levels of bird watching depending upon how serious a person wants to be involved. There is the formally trained professional, an ornithologist as we call them, those who are deep in the science of birds and know all about the many species, their migration habits, their physical makeup, and so on. There was no way I was going down that path, so I checked out other possibilities. There is the group who refer to themselves as “birders.” Birders are not professional but they are serious. They know the best time of year to spot certain kinds of birds. Birders read books and keep logs, and go out into the wild to catch a glimpse of the most elusive variety of birds. This is no light hearted hobby but a passion, and birders commit significant time and resources to their pursuit. I was not sure I could make that kind of commitment, so I read on and learned there is another level of involvement in this hobby. It's called, not surprisingly and quite simply, bird *watching*, which is exactly what the name implies. Bird watchers just watch, and usually from their own backyard. A backyard bird watcher might have a pair of binoculars within reach and they might keep track of the birds they see, but they don't go much deeper. Just watching is a more casual and relaxed approach, and infinitely less time consuming. That seemed to fit me just fine, except I never did it. Oh, I still notice birds in my yard and feel a little tingle of excitement when I see the first bluebird in the spring or catch a glimpse of a hummingbird gathering nectar from a flower, but it's never been more than that for me. Yes, I once thought seriously about watching birds, but you know what we say, maybe someday.

My story speaks to the experience we all have in the Christian faith. I don't mean to criticize but simply recognize there are levels of commitment when it comes to our life with Jesus. The challenge comes when we do some self-reflection regarding the depth of our faith commitment. We call ourselves “Christian” because we've said “yes” to following Christ in the world. Being a Christian involves a level of commitment that includes not just our thought but our time, our resources, and our decisions about how we connect with others. In the spirit of full transparency, there are times when we are more like “Christ watchers” than Christians. This is why the risen Jesus continues his earthly mission of calling disciples by calling us to do more than watch. Every time we gather as the Church, Jesus calls us to a deeper place, to a life that doesn't just observe Christ from a safe distance, but to a life where Christ is at the center. This is what our reading for today is about. Christians live with Christ at the center and when that happens the result is love. Earlier in the book of 1 John, we read, “...let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” (1 John 3:18) Love in action is the key. As the bible teaches, God is love, and when we know God we know love, we live love. There is no compromise on this. Let's be clear. We must love and this is not just love for God. We put love into action and we love by way of our reaction to others. This is what Christians do. We love. It's the doing of it that matters.

The month of May is National Mental Health Awareness Month. Our congregation is involved in raising our awareness to the fact that those who struggle with mental health deserve our compassion and care. This is love in action. Caring about mental health is one way we walk more deeply with Christ, to experience God's healing and hope, and to respond to the call to love others the way God loves us. To help us move deeper into this compassionate ministry, we have a video to share today as a part of the message. Those who share are members of our church, two adults and one youth. Their courageous sharing inspires us to be more bold in our own expression of love for others. Let's listen: <https://youtu.be/9zeEvv1oTE0>

How grateful we are to Todd, Alyssa and Estella for sharing their stories with us. They invite us to go deeper. Two weeks from now, on Sunday, May 16th, we are offering an in-person and online event that will help us learn more about the issues of mental health. The program will show how we can help family and friends, and how we can ensure those who struggle with mental health that they are never alone. The event is called “End the Silence,” and anyone who is highschool age or older is invited to participate. Registration is needed, and you can find more information by going to our website under the “What's Happening” button.

We can do this. We can love in this way. We can be faithful Christians by becoming more compassionate toward those who struggle with mental health. They are loved because we all are loved because God is love. This is the truth and the truth will set us free.