

Coop's Scoops #39 Sunday Sermon May 17th, 2020

The Readings for Easter Six are:

Acts 17: 22-31 Psalm 66:7-18 1 Peter 3: 13-22 John 14: 15-21

(Reference also to Hosea chapter 11: 1-4,8)

Collect: Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you riches beyond imagination. Pour into our hearts such love toward you, that we, loving you above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Sermon:

This morning's readings are about love. It might as well be Valentines as Victoria Day this Monday! We read that the God who is "not us" and "far off" becomes "in us" and "at hand" because of love. He comes near; He shows Himself. He does that for Greeks in the acropolis, for suffering persecuted believers in the first century and for the likes of you and me finding our way in a rapidly changing world now in 2020. Is that your experience? Does He feel close to you? Has He ever? Do you want Him so near?

Picture two seniors (it's okay, they live under the same roof) driving through Bracebridge or Baysville this morning. The man is at the wheel, true to the culture of his youth. The woman is sitting about as far away from him as she can get, nose to the window, her body language shouting "Get me out of here!" They've argued. She looks over at him, and sighs "Remember when we were young? We'd go for a drive in that old jalopy and I'd be snuggled up so close to you that cars behind us didn't know there

were two people in the car! What happened to those two crazy in love kids?” And he looked at her with a wink and a smile and said “Who moved?”. Distance can grow in relationships between people and people, and also between people and God. The amazing and awesome thing is that God WANTS us to live in a love relationship with Him in and through all times and places.

He has **chosen** each of us, and has sought us and called us as surely and steadily as any human suitor ever wooed a sweetheart. He leaves us beautiful gifts...rainbows, flowers, sunsets, baby grins, and all the pleasures that human beings are designed to enjoy. This great loving God longs for us to love Him back. Hosea got that! Chapter 11: .¹⁻⁹ **“When Israel was only a child, I loved him. I called out, ‘My son!’— But when others called him, he ran off and left me. He worshiped the popular sex gods, played with the toy gods. Still I stuck with him. I led my Ephraim. I rescued him but he never acknowledged my help, never admitted that I was the one pulling his wagon, That I lifted him, like a baby, to my cheek, that I bent down to feed him. Now he wants to go *back* to Egypt or go over to Assyria— anything but return to me! But how can I give up on you, Ephraim? How can I turn you loose, Israel? I can’t bear to even think such thoughts. I will roar like a lion— Oh, how I’ll roar! My frightened children will come running from the west. Like frightened birds they’ll come from Egypt, from Assyria like scared doves. And I move them back into their homes. With me.”**

The Scriptures are abundantly clear that we are loved, and that God will make Himself known to us so that we can love Him too.

This is what Peter was telling the men of Athens in the Acropolis. “Don’t look for Him in anything you’ve made, don’t think of Him as made

of wood or gold or silver...He has drawn near to you in the One called Jesus. God is not hiding. He is at hand, and very near, and full of love.” We worship the God who comes close. It cost Him everything to do that...to make us His very own. Sin had to be dealt with; not overlooked or swept under the rug. Justice had to be done for the widows and the orphans. John preached a baptism of repentance. How **are** we reconciled to God? Is love enough?

Another metaphor...it’s something like this. A young man stands before an honourable judge in a scary courtroom. He finds his voice and whispers “I’m guilty, your Honour”. The Judge sits in power and authority but is having trouble finding his voice as well. He had had high hopes for the one standing before him awaiting sentence. Quite naturally, as the young man was his own son. The gavel bangs. A huge, unpayable fine is imposed. Impossible for the boy. Impossible. So the judge climbed out of his chair, and came down to stand beside his boy, reached into his own wallet and signed away all his savings to the bailiff. The LAW was satisfied. And so was the LOVE. Something a little bit like that happens when justice and mercy kiss each other.

How then are we who follow Jesus to live? In our Gospel, He tells us clearly. “Those who love Me keep my commandments. He says “If you keep my commandments, I will love you and the Father will love you and I will live in you and you will live in Me.” It’s phrased a little differently in John chapter 8. “ If you are keep my commandments, then you will be my disciples, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” The culture of our world wants to reverse the whole order set out by Jesus. Wants to check the faith out and decide if it may just possibly be true, then decide for oneself whether or not to become a disciple, and if one does want

to be a disciple, then start living according to the teachings of Jesus. That is not what Jesus' is teaching. That is not Love's way. Love begins with doing what pleases the beloved (keep the commandments). As trust is built, more of the beloved is made known (I and the Father will love you, live in you!) As discipleship continues, the one who loves knows the perfect freedom of also being the one who is beloved. And that truth sets them free. In our relationship with Jesus, Love is not in the falling- it is in the staying. Not in the feeling, but in the doing. That's the message of this morning.

But I can't close until we think together about something difficult. We may believe that Jesus does love us when we keep His commandments, just as He says. Yet, because we are human, and we are imperfect, and we worry, sometimes we may ask "But Jesus, will you love me when I don't keep your commandments? Does it all boil down to works after all? Is it all on me? Do I have to 'earn' your love?"

Let me just put that question to bed for you right now. Jesus answered it when He taught about the young man who wasted his inheritance, broke his father's heart, and wound up slopping pigs, a broke and defeated prodigal. Jesus tells us that the Father was looking for his boy every day....saw him coming when he was still a long way off...and gathered him into his loving arms before a single word of regret or apology was ever uttered. **Yes, Jesus loves you** when you don't keep His commandments.... But He is overjoyed and proud when you do! He has such faith in you and me and all who believe that He promises to send the Holy Spirit to live **in** us. **WE** are the proper Temple of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus when our hearts are filled with **love of Him which lives actively for Him**. Not perfectly. But day by day. Our sins cannot overcome the

Spirit; the Spirit overcomes, eclipses, our sin. Which means it is gone.
Grace abounds. Love wins. Rejoice and be glad! Amen.

Prayers of Response:

Lord Jesus, how we thank you for your great love toward us. Father God,
how we praise your kindness to Israel and Ephraim, for you heart that
becomes tender when You think of us. “Amazing love, How can it Be, That
Thou my God should’st die for me” Stir up our hearts to love You as You
love us. Give us resolve to follow your commandments. Let us rejoice in the
Truth which sets us free. Your commandments to us are full of life.
Receive our honour and our praise! Forever and ever. Amen.

O Lord Jesus,
You who came to us
To show us the compassionate love of your Father
Make your people know this love
With their hearts, minds and souls,
And to me, O Lord, your stumbling friend,
Show your mercy. Amen.

-Henri Nouwen, “Show Me the Way”, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994, pg. 45