

Sermon for Epiphany 4C  
Sunday, January 30, 2022  
“Love is the answer. Love is the way”

Text: Jeremiah 1:4-10; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal...Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

The central message for us today is love, but the lectionary takes us there by way of a journey that needs some unpacking. Jeremiah’s prophecy in the first reading testifies to the fact that God creates human beings for a purpose. In the previous two Sundays we heard St. Paul offer wisdom and encouragement to the Corinthian Christian community about that very message: that every member of the Body of Christ has a function in that body and a purpose in proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ to the world.

So the story from today’s Gospel lesson presents us with an example of Jesus coming into his own and declaring his purpose to the people he knew, the people of his hometown, his family, his friends, his acquaintances. But, as we just heard, that didn’t go so well for him. They didn’t want to believe the stories they were hearing about the great wisdom he was demonstrating. They didn’t want to believe that the carpenter’s son was capable of such deep understanding of the scriptures. He didn’t have the right background, he didn’t have the right education, he wasn’t from the right class. They were looking for anything they could to discredit him, and when they couldn’t, they tried to throw him off a cliff. But, that didn’t deter him from fulfilling his purpose and proclaiming his message of love throughout the region of Galilee. For the remainder of his ministry, Jesus set out on a journey to proclaim the message of love in word and in deed. He taught, he preached, he healed, he defended those at the margins, he called people out for their outward demonstrations of religious piety and their inward poverty of love and respect toward others.

That brings us chronologically back to Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians in which he advised them of exactly the same message that Jesus had been preaching—faith in God is important, hope in God is important, but if those things aren’t lived out with love, then they don’t mean anything. Paul was writing to a community of Christians who had become arrogant and dismissive toward each other, so he was calling them back to the central message of Jesus Christ. He was calling them back to the kind of love that originates with God and is directed toward others and the care for their well being. Paul uses the Greek word *‘agape’* which describes that kind of love; it is the kind of love we share as Christians when we gather around the Eucharistic table—love for each other despite our differences, despite our shortcomings, despite our failures.

The challenge of people needing to love one another and care for each other's well being was familiar to Jeremiah in his time when the people of Israel were in exile in Bablyon and the people of Judah were struggling to remain faithful. The challenge was familiar to Jesus as he confronted people who focused on religious piety at the expense of each others' well being. The challenge was familiar to Paul preaching and advising budding Christian communities. And, the challenge is even before us in our own time. We have a responsibility to proclaim a message of love. Now, I am certain that this is not news to us; we've heard this before—love your neighbor, love God, love yourself. I say this all the time.

On Tuesday, the Bishop has told all clergy that we must take the day off and go on a personal retreat in lieu of us meeting in person for our usual winter Clergy Day. And our assignment is to read a book by the Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry called *Love is the Way*. I'm looking forward to reading it and perhaps you'll hear me make references to it in future sermons. I think I'm going to ask our Tuesday Evening Bible Study group to read the book for Lent and it will be the topic for our discussions. If you've heard the PB preach, that is his mantra—love is the way—and the supreme task for us, the followers of the Jesus Movement, is to proclaim his message of love. That message is of primary importance in our world, because the world we live in needs a heck of a lot more love.

These days, so much of the struggles that we hear about happening in our nation are centered around equality, equity, Black Lives Matter, All Lives Matter, Women's rights, transgender rights, the right to own a gun, the right not to get vaccinated for the coronavirus, the right to free speech, the right to have an abortion. We hear about everyone's individual rights, but the thing that seems to be missing from the conversation is talk about love. Instead, one group vilifies the opposing group. People are drawn to feelings of hate when others disagree or hold a different opinion. People feel compelled to take from others because they think it's what they deserve. But none of these struggles for equality, independence, freedom, or anything else mean nothing if love isn't at the core of the efforts. I'm talking about the *agape* love that Paul wrote about. Worse still, too often, even Christians put so much emphasis and effort in following the words of the Bible, that we neglect the well-being of our neighbors. Churches who shun others for their difference of opinions and their politics, churches who deny others full inclusion in their worshipping communities because of their life decisions regarding their bodies, their health, their identity, their livelihood, or whom they vote for. Many Christians have gone back to the arrogant and dismissive ways of the Corinthians.

If we are going to be faithful Christians who live in the hope of transforming our lives and this world, then we need to be demonstrating and proclaiming Jesus Christ's message that love wins. Love our enemies. Love those with opinions different from our own. Love those whose choices in life are not the choices we would have made. Love for the sake of love. That's not easy to do, because we are human. Much of the world out there will think we're crazy. People will say we're being taken advantage of. Some

may even want to throw us off a cliff. That's what the world did to great people like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and Mahatma Ghandi, who proclaimed that message. When we feel inadequate in our task, let us not forget the words given by God to Jeremiah: "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." We are God's people and we must confide in him to get us through this journey of life. Keep love in our hearts and pray for strength to go on. We are people of The Way. Love is the answer. Love is the way. Amen.

### Resources

[https://www.episcopalchurch.org/bible\\_study/bible-study-epiphany-4-c-january-30-202/](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/bible_study/bible-study-epiphany-4-c-january-30-202/)