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Romans 12:9-21

The Marks of a Christian

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Romans 12:9-21 (The Message)

“Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.  Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.  Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they’re happy; share tears when they’re down. Get along with each other; don’t be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don’t be the great somebody.  Don’t hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you’ve got it in you, get along with everybody. Don’t insist on getting even; that’s not for you to do. “I’ll do the judging,” says God. “I’ll take care of it.”  Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he’s thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don’t let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.”

What a week at Greenland Hills United Methodist Church! Wednesday was a wonderful day because Amanda and Andrew Quicksall arrived from the Congo with their daughters Rebekah and Eliza. It was last September that Amanda and Andrew shared with our church family in worship about the calling that they felt on their lives to adopt. And next Sunday at noon we will celebrate and welcome the new Quicksall family of 6.

Here in the church building, the Preschool teachers have been in all week getting their classrooms ready and Thursday night we had the Meet and Greet and every child was so excited and ready to go to school! And in worship over the next few weeks we are going to be studying the Five Love Languages which is a book written by Gary Chapman.

In case any of you are wondering why we are we talking about love, I wanted to kick-off that study with us looking at this passage from Romans. If your Bible has headings, this section is titled The Marks of a Christian. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus the Christ. This passage of scripture shares with us what we are called to be as well as what we are called to do. The front of our bulletin shares that our mission statement as United Methodists as to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and our vision as Greenland Hills is to create a multi-generational community engaged in advocacy and solidarity with the poor in resources and the poor in spirit.

Our mission statement as Christians is these words from Romans 12. No matter what church we are a part of, whether it is Roman Catholic, Baptist, non-denominational, Episcopalian, Lutheran or Methodist, Romans 12 is what Christians are. Period. Loving sincerely, hating evil, holding on to what is good, serving God, rejoicing with hope, praying, helping others, welcoming others, rejoicing and weeping with others, associating with the lowly, leaving vengeance to God, living in peace to the best of our ability, treating our enemies with kindness, overcoming evil with good.

We are a people saved by grace. We can open ourselves to God’s transforming grace and we can invite God’s transforming grace to come into our life. Transformation is God’s job and the life described in our scripture today comes from God. But accepting and applying the transformation is our job.

There once was a couple that was having marital trouble. The wife went to talk to her pastor and she was full of hatred toward her husband. She said that she not only wanted to divorce him and get rid of him, but she wanted to get even. She said she wanted to hurt her husband as much as she had been hurt. So the pastor suggested something unusual. “Go home and act as if you really love your spouse. Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him for every decent trait. Go out of your way to be as kind, considerate, and generous as possible. Spare no efforts to make him happy. Make him believe you love him. After you've convinced him of your undying love and that you cannot live without him, then drop the bomb. Tell him that you're getting a divorce. That will really hurt him.” And with revenge in her eyes, she smiled and exclaimed, "Beautiful, beautiful. Will he ever be surprised!" And she did it, with enthusiasm. For two months she showed love, kindness, giving, she listened. And when she didn't return to the pastor’s office, the pastor called and asked, "Are you ready now to go through with the divorce?" "Divorce?" she said. "Never! I discovered I really do love him." Her actions had changed her feelings. The ability to love was established by repeated deeds.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Make your life a gift to God; use your gifts well; avoid evil and stick with good; love one another; respect all people; work hard and do not be lazy; serve God; be joyful and hopeful; be patient when you suffer; pray; share with those in need.

Tomorrow we celebrate Labor Day which has been celebrated since 1887 as a recognition of the American labor movement and the social and economic achievements of workers. Yearly we give tribute for the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity and well-being of our country. Our labor history in the United States includes organized labor, which has helped secure much of what we take for granted today, such as the minimum wage, the 40 hour work-week, family leave, health insurance, Social Security, Medicare, and retirement plans.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Yesterday Oak Cliff United Methodist Church with Jobs with Justice Texas hosted a Workers’ Rights Board Hearing and Labor Day Weekend march. At that event low-income workers shared their desire for dignity, respect, equal rights. You know, basic stuff. Patrick, who works at the Dallas zoo, shared his story and his desire to make a living wage. Patrick makes $8.50 an hour, could you live on $8.50 an hour? Monica Hillard, a Walmart employee, spoke about being a “part-time employee” who works full-time hours without benefits. Walmart in Dallas employs 38,000 and the average pay is $8.40 an hour. Community organizer, Billy Meyer, called that “poverty wages.” He shared that the typical Walmart worker's goal is to get off food stamps.[[3]](#footnote-4)

The union movement in America had this amazing idea that solidarity is what is most important because the interests of all are the most important thing. At the event at Oak Cliff UMC SMU Professor Joerg Reiger shared, “We don't have much power as individuals, we only really have power in community, in solidarity.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

God calls us to love all of our neighbors, including the millions of workers in our own country and in the world. Without the work of billions of people life would be very different. Our clothes would be homemade, the food on our tables would be monotonous and scarce, we would not be driving in cars, and our houses would be limited to what we can build with our own hands. Workers improve all of our lives.

While workers contribute to making all of our lives better, we have not always contributed to making their lives better. The minimum wage is too low to survive on. Workers are discouraged from organizing themselves and workers who try to organize themselves are often fired. So on this Labor Day we ask, how have we demonstrated our love for the workers in our economy, in America and around the world? Are we showing our love for our brothers and sisters in standing up for justice? How can we do a better job embodying our love for workers so that justice is served? And what are we learning about God in the process?[[5]](#footnote-6)

C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity, writes, “Do not waste your time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor, act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of life’s great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

Love is the new normal for God’s people. Jesus tells us all the law and the prophets hang on loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself. The Apostle Paul assumes that we know that we are to love. But Paul wants us to know that the love that we have for each other is to be genuine. Let your love be heartfelt; be eager to show each other honor; be set on fire by the Spirit; be devoted to prayer; participate in the needs of the saints, and pursue hospitality. Give of yourself and your own resources for the needs of others.

Yesterday we took the kids to the Lego kidfest at the convention center. We had been there about 3 hours when I saw a woman wearing a Christian t-shirt speak very rudely to the staff member manning the bounce house booth. Yes, there were a lot of people, yes people were tired, but did she really have to act the way that she did when she was wearing a Christian t-shirt? It even had a scripture verse on it!

The Apostle Paul wants all of us to live in light of God’s mercies. Our job is to show love, not to act as judge. We have been shown mercy, so we show mercy by tending to enemies in need. We treat opponents like family. We initiate doing good to opponents. We overcome evil with good.

And we do all of this in community because all of the verbal forms that Paul uses are plural. It is almost like Paul is saying don’t try this alone. He is talking to a bunch of people about their life together. Over the next weeks as we talk about love may we remember that we love because God loves us. So, may we make our life a gift to God; may we use our gifts well; may we avoid evil and stick with good; may we love one another; respect all people; work hard and not be lazy; serve God; be joyful and hopeful; be patient when you suffer; pray; and share with those in need.

1. http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/l/love.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/09/06/president-obama-labor-day-fight-americas-workers-continues [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Thankful for Rev. Wes Magruder who tweeted during the event. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Thankful for Rev. Wes Magruder who tweeted during the event. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. taken from Jobs with Justice North Texas Labor Day worship resource packet [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/l/love.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-7)