

LEAVE A MARK: ETERNALLY IMPORTANT

Romans 13:8-14

Intro

I'm going to throw you a softball: how can the law of God be summarized? (hint: we are reminded of it every week in the summery of the law)

That's right: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.

This morning's passage picks up the second half of that summary and declares that all other commandments are founded under its umbrella.

Like I said, we've heard that before.

What I would like you to ask is this: why? Why do we love our neighbors as ourselves? The scripture reads this way.

Romans 13:8-14

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³ let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Ezekiel 33:1-11

Intro

Our second passage may seem like it shifts us away from the whole 'love your neighbor as yourself' theme that was established in the reading from Romans. It's talking about the judgment of God and people being along a figurative watchtower. It sounds quite different, unless you focus on the why.

So again, the question I ask you is why do we love our neighbor as ourselves? Do you recognize, do you understand just how important that love, that responsibility that has been placed before us really is? The scripture reads this way.

Ezekiel 33:1-11

³³ The word of the Lord came to me: ² O Mortal, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one of their number as their sentinel; ³ and if the sentinel sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people; ⁴ then if any who hear the sound of the trumpet do not take warning, and the sword comes and takes them away,

their blood shall be upon their own heads. ⁵They heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; their blood shall be upon themselves. But if they had taken warning, they would have saved their lives. ⁶But if the sentinel sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any of them, they are taken away in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at the sentinel's hand.

⁷ So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸ If I say to the wicked, 'O wicked ones, you shall surely die', and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. ⁹ But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life.

¹⁰ Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: 'Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?' ¹¹ Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

"Leave a Mark: Eternally Important"

Alright, so let's get into this. Why do you love your neighbor as yourself? Why?

I am sure that many of us would think of answers like, 'it's the right thing to do', or 'we hope that people would treat us that way, therefore...'. Those answers certainly have some merit.

As I thought about the question of why, I came up with the answer, 'because God calls us to'. As I gave that answer I began to feel myself turning into a toddler in that I just kept asking, 'why?'.

Why do you love your neighbor as yourself? Because God calls us to.

Why does God call us to love our neighbor as ourselves? Because God wants all of creation to know who He is, to trust in him, to follow Him, and the creation is able to begin to know God through the love we share with one another.

Why does God want all of creation to know who He is? Because the judgment of God is coming.

Why is the judgment of God coming? Because the God whom we worship is a just God and when injury has been inflicted (and that is what sin is: injury to God or another), then there needs to be recompense paid.

See, here's the thing: sharing love is not just about being nice.

Is it nice? It can be, absolutely!

But the love that we are called to share with one another is founded in a 'why' that is so much bigger than being nice.

Loving our neighbor can have eternal ramifications.

I am not saying that the eternal life of our neighbor's 'is all on us'. We worship a God who is bigger than the limited ways that His sin-filled creation is able to (hopefully) share and display His love.

But this is something that the Creator of God has called us to. Paul, the great theologian of the church states to us in Romans that all 'other commandment(s), are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself', before reminding his readers and us here this morning, 'that we know what time it is'.

What time is it?

As we hear in Ezekiel, it is time to stand up along the lookouts of our world and show through who we are and how we live, the truth that we have placed our faith in a God who is just and will deliver justice, and we need to make sure that the world around us, knows it.

If the world doesn't respond, well, that's on them: we cannot control how people are going to respond to the people of God answering the Call of God by sharing the love of God by loving one another (it may sound convoluted, but I think it works!). How the world responds should not impact how we love.

We love because God has called us to. How is your world able to experience that from you?

Because it needs to be experienced.

It needs to leave a mark.

Because there are all sorts of things that are out there in the world leaving marks in so many ways.

I'll start with a simple example. Wednesday of this past week, I saw a headline that said that police in Lititz, PA (you know, that hustling, bustling metropolis just outside of Lancaster) were 'terrified' by six red balloons that has been tied to sewer grates in the small town. You know what I saw when I drove through Flemington a few days later? Red balloons tied to sewer grates.

Now, for those of you who are tied into pop culture, or at the very least the vein of pop culture that includes recently released movies (or Stephen King novels) what do those balloons represent?

That's right, those balloons have left a mark so that we think about the creepy clown from the book 'It'.

Call it advertising. Call it a viral marketing campaign. Call it whatever you want. It still is working to leave a mark.

The Church needs to do the same.

But the reality is that, 'The Church' is so fragmented that the only sort of reaction that it seems able to illicit anymore is a negative one, whether that be because one of its televangelists doesn't open the arena that serves as a sanctuary fast enough to those who were forced out of their homes because of hurricane Harvey, or because a former presidential advisor says that the only reason that the (Catholic) church supports DACA is because 'it needs illegals to fill the churches' pews and offering plates.

Here's the thing, if we are waiting for someone 'at the top' of the contemporary Church to say, 'here's what you need to do' to leave that mark, we are going to end up feeling confused or even rudderless because for every voice that says 'X', there is another that says 'Y', you know, the exact opposite.

But if we actually allow the message that is offered through Scripture (imagine that: trusting in how God is speaking through Scripture!), then we are responding in a way that will not only make a mark in the here and now, but may leave a mark that has eternal consequence.

When you need prayer, ask for it.

When others request prayer, pray for them and when it's possible (and makes sense) pray with them.

Check in on your neighbors, not just because there's a giant storm coming your way, but because the call of God to love neighbor as self means reaching out to care (which many times means just taking the time to know how that neighbor is doing).

Look, there are too many corners of our society that feed off of, 'how can I get mine', or at the very least, 'what you have is better than what I have...so now I want what you've got.'

We, as members of the Body of Christ, which are the church, don't need to worry about going out into the world and making huge society changing marks. But if we are all willing and able to reach out in our own small ways and feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the imprisoned, and comfort the sick, and do so in the name of Christ, the mark that will be left might be difficult to name, but the kingdom that will be built will be impossible to ignore.

As it says in Ezekiel, God wants us to turn back from [sinful] ways, and turn toward Him. I absolutely believe that one person being willing to share the love of God has the capability of causing others to be directed toward the one whom we were following when we showed that love: God. The power of loving our neighbor as ourselves allows the power of the Holy Spirit to seep into people's lives in ways that can be so unexpected.

Much like the parable of the sower, it is not our responsibility to cultivate the seeds of life that God shares through how we live, yet alone collect them: that's all God!

Our responsibility is to love our neighbor as ourselves, and it is so very important.

How is that able to be felt in your life? It can be done in so many ways, what about yours?

If what you see when you think about yourself are all the ways that 'you can't' love this, that, and the other person, I need you to take off the blinders of sin and be reminded of the important part that we are to play in the sharing of God's salvation with the entirety of creation.

Why do we love our neighbor as ourselves?

We do so not because it is nice or it makes us feel good (regardless of how true that may be) but because God has called us to do so. And, as we hear in Romans and had reinforced in Ezekiel, we know what time it is.

Don't take this reminder lightly: it can be eternally important!

Sons and daughters of Christ: love your neighbor as yourself.

After Sermon Prayer

You have called us, Lord, to love our neighbor as ourselves and we do so because, through the gift of faith, You have allowed us to see that You are a just God who both longs for but also needs the creation to turn back to You in order for eternal life in You to exist. God, lead us, work at us, and work through us to serve You in this eternally important way. Let us love our neighbors as ourselves. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.