

God is Greater Than Our Hearts April 22, 2018 First Parish Church,
Brunswick

Last week I went to Cleveland, Ohio to the United Church of Christ's headquarters, also known as the Mothership... for a gathering of Members in Discernment. Fifty of us came together from all across the United States to worship, share, laugh and learn together. The expression of each person's calling was wonderful- from folks who used music therapy in their chaplaincy with Alzheimer patients to one woman who had a housing ministry which in part entailed her going through abandoned homes in the city she lived in to see if they could be made habitable again. Again and again I heard people express their love of the United Church of Christ, their passion for God and for justice, especially their passion for justice- environmental justice, racial justice, and it was that word "love" that kept coming up...

In the English language Love is such a quirky word isn't it? I say that I love pizza... a thin crisp crust, bubbling cheese, with pepperoni... just love it. Anyone else out here love pizza? Plain cheese... loaded veggie... It's all so yummy. **And** I love my children, their smiles, their laughter, the interesting way their minds work... I love them. So does that mean that I feel the same

way about pizza as I do about my kids?! Love is a funny word in the english language.

Love is also a word we frequently use in church... God is Love. Jesus is Love. Love one another. Love your neighbor... Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love and the greatest of these is love.

I'd like to have us all do a little exercise: think of someone you love, perhaps that someone is sitting next to you, perhaps they are miles away... Fill your heart with your love for this person... now let that love flow through you and out to the people sitting beside you, let it flow out of your heart to those sitting in front of you... behind you...

In the interest of time I am going to stop here, but in the full meditation we would have grown our love to wrap around the whole world. It is the closest I can come in my imagination to comprehending what God's love for all creation is like.

I'm going to guess that some of you are familiar with this meditation, some of you may found this exercise a little odd... perhaps you started making up your grocery list, I'm wondering if some of you didn't have the experience that I often have when I practice this... Imaging my heart filled with love for one person I can do, imagining that love spreading to those

immediately around me, I usually can do that too, but what I run into at some point in this meditation is someone's face will come to mind and I hit the brakes, my stomach clenches and I think, "Them?! I have to love them?!" Oh no. It is comforting to think that God's love doesn't falter, but wraps around us all.

And that brings us to the reading from today 1 John 3:16-24.

The text today starts out with love- we know what love is by how Jesus lived, we know what love is by how Jesus died. Jesus laid down his life for us, so we ought to do that for one another, Laying down our lives isn't so much about dying for someone else, as it is living for someone else, putting their needs ahead of our own as an act of love.

Now, we are not always going to get it right. Who does?! We may mean to give to generously to an important cause, but when it gets right down to it, we justify not writing that check, after all we need a little more fun money- we work hard, we deserve it! Our so our culture seems to tell us. And yes, we did sign up to volunteer, but something else came up. It can be a challenge to put our faith into action and maintain that day in and day out. We know it's not the best way to be, that we are not being our best selves when we make these choices, I would guess that more than one of us

has acted in this way, making the selfish, not so love filled choice.

sometimes, we fail. Sometimes we just don't do a very good job of paying attention to the needs of others, because our own needs are so great. When we doubt our own capacity to love, and beat ourselves up for not seeing the need around us, for not being present for one another. The writer of 1 John tells us that God "will reassure our hearts whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and knows everything." God is greater than our hearts... I am so thankful for that. the writer goes on to note that we will receive what we ask of God when we follow God's commandment, the one simple commandment to believe in Jesus Christ and love one another.

Okay, simple it may not be, it takes practice. It takes practice to live into this commandment. It require repetition to become our natural way of living. Laying down our lives to take up a life of love can be challenging. Yet that is what we are called to do and we are called not just to love in an abstract way and we are not called to show our love solely by means of our bank account, that is where we give or spend our money. No, our scripture tells us that we are to love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And that is important for our life together. That is important for us as a

church. Our faith should be visible to others by how we act, by how we love...not what we say. Which means that we cannot live just for ourselves, we need to make sure that we are not only asking what our neighbors need, but working alongside them to make it happen. Dr. Jane Goodall, once said, "What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

Here at First Parish we are already so generous with our time, and our resources. We do so much for our community, for the people in our town, yet our town is always changing. The world is always changing and our still speaking God calls us to grow in new ways as we walk in love. In the words of Rev. Heath, a United Church of Christ minister at the Congregational Church of Exeter, New Hampshire, "The journey every week starts here. Think of your pew as your launching pad. Here we say, and sing, the words of our faith, we get ready to become people of action. And when you leave here, you go out into a world that needs that action. It's a world that needs followers of Christ, not just Christians In name only."