

Uncomfortable Faith: Uncomfortable Love  
Isaiah 54:9-10; Romans 8:37-39; 1 John 3:1-3  
St. Mark's & St. James UCC ~ August 30, 2020  
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Consider what John is saying: Christ has come the first time, lived, grown, preached, taught, performed miracles, was arrested, crucified, died and buried and rose on the third day. And later ascended to heaven.

John says, “what we will be has not yet been made known” ~ we have not yet reached our full potential.

“we know when Christ appears” not the first time, since that has already happened; but the second coming of Christ, “we will be like him.”

Think of the various ways John could be talking about – that we could be like Jesus. Filled with compassion, love and mercy. Having a heart for justice and righteousness – justice not necessarily according to man’s laws but God’s laws. And righteousness as being in a close, tender, loving, right relationship with God.

Able to heal other’s when they are hurting. Willing to feed others when they are hungry. Wanting to share this... good news of God ~ of eternal life and salvation ~ with others around us. Just like Jesus.

John goes on to say, “all who have this hope in him”

Hope in Jesus:

hope in all Christ offers:

hope in all Christ has done for us:

hope in Christ coming back again:

hope in life eternal with Him...

“all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”

Imagine being as pure as Jesus Christ

“as pure as the driven snow” as William Shakespeare would tell us in his play, *The Winter’s Tale* and again in *Macbeth* when Macbeth himself was described as someone who “will seem as pure as snow.”

This purity is an innocence of the heart, a cleansing of the stain of sin.

a purity like that of an angel beyond any power to corrupt.

Just as Jesus is pure.

Who wouldn’t want to be purified like that? But that purification comes first with two things: 1) God’s love. A love lavished upon us. And 2) A knowing of Jesus Christ and a knowing, or faith, hope in his return.

Isn’t it amazing? I love the song *Amazing Grace* and we’re going to sing in just a little while. The story of how that song came to be is a tribute to God’s grace for the worst of us.

But could we just as easily write a song called *Amazing Love* – a song that sings a tribute to God’s love of all of us, even the worst of us?

Amazing love, how tender the touch

I was a hateful man.

There was only me, but now I see.

Your love, will set me free.

One of the difficulties we face today when trying to understand what love is all about is that we sometimes get confused and think it's all about tummies with butterflies and blushing cheeks. It's about passion, pain, highs, lows, and it's subject to come and go – as these feelings change and its as dynamic as the weather. But if there's one thing our God of the Bible teaches us in the Bible about love, it is that it is not primarily a feeling. It's a commitment.

One of the stories Dr. Michael Slaughter tells – he was appointed to his church In Ginghamburg which was 4-miles from Tipp City, population 7,000. He began pastoring in 1979 with an average of 90 people on Sundays. 15 years later they were worshipping around 1500 on Sundays with about 2500 people calling Ginghamburg their home church.

I didn't know it at the time, but he went to the same seminary I did – many years before I did. Evidently he had a nickname – Rock. Because he was hardheaded, stubborn, and intent on letting God work through him to build the church.

In his 2nd week of marriage he and his wife Carolyn had a big argument. They had a brief honeymoon and now were back. Mike was beginning his final year of college. That morning he left for school. In the afternoon he went from the campus to meet with a church youth group he was leading. When he finally got home it was about 7:00pm.

There was Carolyn standing in the hallway – very obviously angry. And rightfully so! “Where have you been?” she asked. “I made us a nice dinner.” And while Mike searched for the right response (he never did find the right one).

She continued, “You didn't even call.”

Uh oh. No one ever asked me to call like that before. What have I done?

“I can’t live the way I used to live. I’m only 21-years old and I’ve said I’ll remain in this relationship for life. That could be a very long time. Do I really want this?”

“Yes.” I knew I’d have to change. I would have to learn responses based on commitment, not on feelings.

Love is more than a feeling – it is a commitment.

Back in our Old Testament God chose Israel as his people. And time and again Israel is described as idolatrous, adulterous, wishy-washy and turning-away-from-God people. Yet, always continued to pursue his people.

No matter what he always pulled them back to him yet God always pursued his people. His love was steadfast. I have to assume there were times where God felt like – this just isn’t going to work:

When he made it rain 40 days and 40 nights to cleanse the world. Even then he gave the people a way by telling Noah to build an Ark and to take two of every animal aboard until land was once again visible and habitable.

Or when Moses was on Mt. Sinai getting the 10 Commandments and the people were at the bottom of the mountain having Aaron make the a Golden Calf to worship. Moses cast down the tablets breaking them. And the Lord was so angry he was going to destroy the people, but Moses intervened and God did not. And the Lord was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him, but Moses interceded also on his behalf, and the Lord did not.

40 days and 40 nights Moses lay prostrate before the Lord, praying and telling God Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – remember them and the promise you made to them. These people

are the people of your very own possession. You brought them here by your great power and by your outstretched arm.

Moses was right to recall the covenant God had made with his people. Love doesn't (it can't) rely on emotional satisfaction.

As much as I might try to do well enough to make Brenda and Grace love me ~ and on those days I don't try as hard... it's not enough.

The love God had with his people was covenantal. The love I have for my wife and that she has with me is not based on emotion.

Ngina Otiende (gay-nuh O-tiende) once said, "Marriage is meant to keep people together, not just when things are good, but particularly when they are not. That's why we take marriage vows, not wishes."

This does not extend to God's covenant to us; but rather comes from God's covenant to us.

As Christ is the groom and the church is Christ's bride ~ we understand that we the people are the church, hence we are married to Christ in a covenantal commitment. We take vows at our baptisms, our confirmations, our joining the church – if it's not by confirmation, and at our marriages. These vows are our covenant with the church, Christ, God and to all of you – to remain in a caring, loving, generous, sacrificial relationship no matter how we might feel at the moment.

Something else that's important for us to keep in mind around this 4-letter word: Love! Love isn't just for the loveable. It's for our enemies too.

Did you ever stop to think – seriously – that God doesn't love us because we are loveable? Or because we first loved God? God loves us when we are rebellious, petty, sinful, spiritually ugly, cantankerous; when we undermine God and take credit for God's work ourselves.

And God didn't love and chose Israel because they added something valuable to his existence or because they were irresistible. There is no, absolutely none, explanation for his love for them. Except his love for them.

God's love doesn't wait for us to be deserving of it. His love descends to us. We couldn't make our way up to him, so he made his way down to us.

What this means for us is that we don't love in order to receive anything special in return. We love to be obedient. Love isn't about earning, but it does require effort. Love calls us to do things:

Like serve our neighbors; bring a meal to someone who is hurting; call someone you haven't seen in sometime.

Love even calls us to do things that have the potential to cause us harm: like take in refugees who are fleeing dictatorship in their home country. Cruciform love is welcoming the immigrant because they bear the image of God, even if the only thing they bring to us is hassle and possibly harm.

Do we refuse to take in a refugee because we're concerned about the possibility of harm coming to us, or do we take in the refugee out of a sacrificial love that says, "You are welcome at my table even if it costs me something."

Cruciform love is praying for those who persecute us: ISIS terrorists, IRS, political opposites. It is praying for a cessation to racism and hateful speech of all forms. It is embracing the homeless person despite the smell; loving those whom we disagree with – even if they don't love us back.

A love that is only convenient and conditional is not love. If love means ~ it has to be my way or the highway it is not love. To love means to go out of your way. To be inconvenienced and to sacrifice for the sake of others.

May they know we are Christians by our love, not because we are great! But because the Holy Spirit is at work within us.