October 20, 2019

Living Love, Joy and Kindness

Jeremiah 31:27-34
Galatians 5:22

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF A THREE-PART SERMON SERIES ON STEWARDSHIP. OUR THEME IS GALATIANS 5:22 THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT. THIS FIRST SERMON WILL DEAL WITH THE FIRST THREE MENTIONED RESULTS OF THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT- LOVE, JOY AND KINDNESS. BEING SPIRIT FILLED, FOR MANY TRADITIONS, IS A MYSTERIOUS BUSINESS, WITH SIGNS OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES, PROPHECY, OR MIRACLES PERFORMED. BUT THE TRUE MARK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT’S PRESENCE IS EXPANSIVE LOVE, JOY IN LIFE AND KINDNESS TO ALL. THE MORE WE CONNECT TO THE POWER OF GOD, THE BETTER WE CAN LIVE OUR LIVES.

LOVE

IT'S SOMETHING EACH OF US WANTS, BUT MANY NEVER FIND: GENUINE LOVE. ALL AROUND US WE CAN SEE AN ENDLESS PURSUIT OF LOVE. BUT WHAT IS LOVE, AND WHERE CAN WE GO TO FIND LASTING LOVE FOR OUR LIVES?

LOVE IS OFTEN DESCRIBED IN TERMS OF FEELINGS. BUT TRUE LOVE -- WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS CALLED AGAPE LOVE -- IS NOT BASED ON FEELINGS AT ALL. AGAPE LOVE CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE AND SET YOU FREE. AND IT ALL BEGINS WITH A DECISION YOU MUST MAKE.
AGAPE LOVE IS A DECISION TO CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF OTHERS AHEAD OF YOUR OWN NEEDS ... TO LIVE SACRIFICIALLY ... TO GIVE WITHOUT DEMANDING A RETURN ... TO OVERLOOK AN OFFENSE. MOST OF ALL, AGAPE LOVE IS A DECISION TO RECEIVE AND RESPOND TO GOD'S LOVE. FOR ALL OUR EFFORTS TO LOVE OTHERS WILL NOT BEAR FRUIT UNLESS WE ARE RESPONDING TO HIS LOVE. AS THE BIBLE SAYS, "WE LOVE, BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US."

TO GROW IN LOVE WE MUST CONTINUE RECEIVING GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS THROUGH THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. WE WILL ALSO BE FULFILLING HIS GREATEST COMMAND: TO LOVE GOD AND OUR NEIGHBORS. THIS LOVE MUST INEVITABLE OVERFLOW INTO ACTIONS. ULTIMATELY, THE VERIFIABLE WITNESS OF OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER WILL PROVE TO THE WORLD THAT WE ARE TRULY DISCIPLES OF JESUS.

JOY

THE WORD **JOY** APPEARS OVER AND OVER AGAIN IN THE SCRIPTURES. FOR INSTANCE, THE PSALMS ARE FILLED WITH REFERENCES TO JOY. THE PSALMISTS WRITE, “WEEPING MAY TARRY FOR THE NIGHT, BUT JOY COMES WITH THE MORNING” (**PS. 30:5B**) AND “SHOUT FOR JOY TO GOD, ALL THE EARTH” (**PS. 66:1**). LIKewise, IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, WE READ THAT JOY IS A FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHICH MEANS THAT IT IS A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE.
Sometimes we struggle to grasp the biblical view of joy because of the way it is defined and described in Western culture today. In particular, we often confuse joy with happiness. I always cringe a little when I see that, not because I am opposed to happiness, but because the word happy in our culture has been sentimentalized and trivialized. As a result, it connotes a certain superficiality. For example, years ago, Charles M. Schulz, in the comic strip Peanuts, coined the adage, “Happiness is a warm puppy,” and it became a maxim that articulated a sentimental, warm-and-fuzzy idea of happiness. Then there was the catchy song “Don’t worry, be happy,” released by Bobby McFerrin in the 1980s. It suggested a carefree, cavalier attitude of delight.

Kindness

The phrase one another appears 59 times in the New Testament of the Bible as it pertains to how we ought to treat each other. Forgive one another, love one another, honor one another, live in harmony with one another, and serve one another—just to name a few.
TWO PARTICULAR INSTANCES, DUE TO THEIR TIMELINESS AND RELEVANCE, ARE ACCEPT AND BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER.

ACCEPTANCE IS OFTEN QUOTED IN TODAY’S CULTURE. IT’S A HOT TOPIC, POLITICALLY CORRECT, AND USUALLY SYNONYMOUS WITH “TOLERANCE.” WHAT PEOPLE USUALLY MEAN BY ACCEPTANCE AND TOLERANCE IS THAT WE SHOULD APPROVE OF EVERYONE’S LIFE CHOICES AND BEHAVIORS. TO “LIVE AND LET LIVE.” THIS MENTALITY INSTANTLY SHUTS DOWN CORRECTION OR SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE, RESPECT, AND GENTLENESS YET WE CANNOT BE SILENT ABOUT WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE FROM GOD’S WORD.

TO ACCEPT IS TO WELCOME AND INVITE IN. THE CONTEXT OF THIS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT IS THAT JEWS AND GENTILES ARE NOW ONE—UNITED FOR GOD’S PRAISE AND GLORY—THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. SECOND, “BE KIND AND COMPASSIONATE TO ONE ANOTHER...” IT’S ONE THING TO ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER. IT’S SOMETHING ELSE ALTOGETHER TO BE KIND TO SOMEONE YOU DISAGREE WITH. SOME OF US CARRY PAST HURTS, FEARS, AND STEREOTYPES THAT ONLY SERVE AS ROADBLOCKS AND HINDRANCES TO US FULFILLING THE BIBLICAL COMMAND OF KINDNESS. HOWEVER, JESUS CHRIST’S LOVE, GRACE, AND FORGIVENESS ENABLES US TO LET DOWN OUR GUARD—MAKING UNITY POSSIBLE.
HERE ARE FIVE WAYS WE CAN BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER, WHICH WILL LEAD TO HARMONY NOT ONLY IN OUR CHURCHES, BUT ALSO THE WORLD:

1. **FIGHT FIRST IMPRESSIONS.** WE LIKE TO DRAW CONCLUSIONS QUICKLY WHEN WE SEE SOMEONE. BUT WE NEED TO REALIZE THAT EVERY PERSON WE SEE HAS BEEN MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD—NO MATTER HOW DIFFERENT THEY ARE FROM US.

2. **LOVE, DON’T LABEL.** WE’RE VERY GOOD AT LABELING PEOPLE. LABELS AND LAZY, AND THEY ONLY SERVE TO DIVIDE US. CHOOSE LOVE INSTEAD BECAUSE LOVE BRINGS UNITY AND PEACE.

3. **RECOGNIZE ALL PEOPLE HAVE WOUNDS.** WHEN I SEE SOMEONE WHO IS RACIST OR MEAN OR ANGRY, I CAN’T HELP BUT THINK, *SOMETHING’S GOING ON IN THAT PERSON’S LIFE—THE WAY HE WAS RAISED, SOMETHING IN HIS HOME OR IN HIS LIFE.* THERE ARE PEOPLE ALL AROUND US WHO ARE HURTING. LET’S SHOW UNDERSTANDING, COMPASSION, AND GRACE.

4. **LET SCRIPTURE BE YOUR STANDARD.** MOTHER TERESA LIVED BY THE SCRIPTURE, “WHATEVER YOU DID FOR ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME.” IN EVERY SINGLE DETAIL IN THIS CULTURE AND THE BATTLES THAT ARE BEING WAGED, LET SCRIPTURE BE YOUR GUIDE IN YOUR RESPONSE.

5. **MAKE MERCY YOUR MESSAGE.** GOD IS HOLY, RIGHTEOUS, AND MERCIFUL. HE IS ALSO JUST. GOD WILL BRING JUDGMENT
WHEN HE WANTS TO BRING JUDGMENT. BUT MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT.”

THESE THREE GIFTS ARE FOR SHARING. HOW CAN WE SHARE THE LOVE OF GOD, BRING JOY TO THE TROUBLED AND TREAT OTHERS WITH KINDNESS? THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GOOD STEWARD OF GOD’S GIFTS.