

4.11.21

Pastor Barb

So today I want to talk to you about the transitive property of equality. Now, don't get excited, this is not a political phrase. This is actually a phrase that comes from the math world. It's an algebraic formula that says if A equals B and B equals C, then A equals C. Pretty cool, huh. Okay, that's it. I'm done. Don't worry I'm not going to become an algebra teacher.

But let's think of it this way. If Jesus is God, as we hear from the same book of John, the first chapter one through five. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him, not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it."

When John writes those beautiful prologue words in his gospel he's talking about Jesus Christ. "And the Word was with God and the Word was God." So, we believe in the Christian Church that Jesus is God. Then, let's go to 1 John, which is a book further on in the New Testament, one of the letters that was written, an epistle. "So we believe that God is love. And to me, that's the hermeneutic, the lens by which I see in all of scripture that God is love. And when you see God is love, as the way you look at scripture, scripture begins to look different. So in 1 John, the fourth chapter, it says, "Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way. God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. This is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for us for our sin. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. Because love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, for God is love" Says it right there in 1 John.

So, God is love. So if Jesus is God, and God is love. Then, Jesus is love. That's a transitive property of equality. So when we study the life of Jesus through the gospels, we are actually studying the love of God among us. God is love, and everything Jesus does is about love. So let's look at today's story in John. So the house is locked, because the disciples are afraid of the Jews. Everything that's happened up until now, everything that took Jesus to the cross, everything that happened when they went to the open tomb, this is the next day. And they are still not quite sure, so they have themselves locked in the house. And Jesus appears among them, not as a ghost or a spirit but as a physical bodily being. That's why it's important. That's why John talks about seeing the holes in his hand and his side, and the first thing Jesus says to them is, "Peace be with you." And then he tells him that they have the Holy Spirit, so that they can go out and do His work.

But Thomas wasn't there at the time. Thomas, who we have known growing up as Doubting Thomas because he's always identified with this passage right here, wasn't in the room. He was out there, outside of those locked doors. There's other words about Thomas and the Gospel of

John. He just shows up in the list in the other gospels, but in this gospel Thomas has some roles to play. In John 11, when Jesus tells them that Lazarus is dead, and he says, I'm glad he's dead because we're going to go, and by going you will believe. And Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go that we may die with him.' Thomas is more of a heroic figure in that passage. And then in John 14, Thomas says, "Give us directions, Lord, we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?" And Jesus says to him, "I am the way and the truth in the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

So Thomas is courageous. Thomas is brave enough to ask Jesus the tough questions. And then in this passage, we hear that Thomas doubts. Not Jesus, not God, but he is really doubting the words of the disciples. So we put all of that doubt on Thomas, and we speak of it as if we should never doubt, that if you believe you never doubt. But I tell you my life experience has taught me that belief really doesn't mean much, unless we occasionally ask the question. Unless we occasionally stand up with Jesus. And unless we occasionally doubt, because what makes belief, what makes faith real is questioning what it is that we believe.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "You gotta believe in Jesus." And I'm gonna throw Pam Hammer under the bus here, because she gave me a great sermon illustration last week when she told me that the Baptists came to her door and they kept saying, "Are you saved?" And Pam said proudly, "Yes, by grace." And they said, "But you believe that Jesus is your personal Lord and Savior?" And she said, "Yes, because I believe in the grace of God." It drove them nuts and they went away. You might want to use that the next time you get someone at your door. Pam's faith was in the grace of God. And I've had the hardest time getting people who tell me, "you got to believe in the Lord and you have to accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior," to define that. To go underneath that and say, what does that mean? What do you have to believe about God? What does it mean to believe in Jesus? And I think we gather as a community of faith around that very question. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? And I think what we hear in today's text is that it means that we trust so much in the love of God that we dare to be God's hands of love in the world. I'm not sure there really is such a thing as a blind faith. I'm not sure that can hold up under the stress and pressure of the world, then and now. And then Jesus says to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe."

You know preachers through the century, and people through the centuries, have used that to point at us and say look at us, we believe, and we have not seen. But have we seen? Have we been looking? Thomas wasn't in the room. So if we talk about Thomas as someone who lacked faith and lacked belief and lacked trust in God, you have to think about the fact that the disciples were all covered in a room behind the doors, because they didn't think God would protect them. Thomas went out. You have to think about the fact that it wasn't God that Thomas was doubting, even though he knew that Jesus was risen. He was kind of doubting the disciples. So when Jesus shows up and he says, My Lord and my God. He is showing the faith that comes from having seen. And that's what we're challenged to do. Not necessarily to act as if we have to see the bodily presence of Christ. We have all kinds of ways to bring our hearts and minds to Jesus. We have the cross that lies in front of us that walks with us through the darkest days of our lives.

We have our baptism, where we are washed in the water and made clean and made a member of this community. The community that God pulled together so that we could stay connected. And we have this meal, where I say every week that you should touch and taste and feel how real Jesus is. But I want to say to you in this time of darkness, even as the spring arises and the plague is starting to go up again, even as we're getting vaccines and we're starting to see an end, it's still here. Even through all of that, God calls us to see that he is present in all of this.

You know we want to blame God when anything goes wrong. We want to blame God for everything that happens. And then when things go well and things get fixed and vaccines start to show up, we take credit. We want to blame God, we don't want to give God credit. But right now, what we need to do is believe that God is present. So back to the transitive quality, the transitive property of equality. Jesus is God and God is love. So when we see love, we see Jesus. When we see love, we see God. And when we see it, and we believe it, then we must live it. And that's why gathering together, that's why Easter Sunday, matters. That's why the community of Christ matters. Because in the community of Christ we are called to look to each other, to lift each other up, to encourage each other to come into a closer relationship with God. And when we do that we come into a closer relationship with love. And when we come into a closer relationship with love, when we actually take in a God who loved us so much God became human, a God who loved us so much God went to the cross, a God who loved us so much that God gave us life eternal. Then, now and forward, that God, that God of love--when you get that every now and then, and hopefully that's what we do when we gather, you can't help but go out and live that love in the world. And when you live that love in the world, the world changes.

So look around you right now, amidst the darkness and look for the light. The light of love. There are people out there that are sacrificing much of their life to keep us healthy. Look to them and see the love of God and believe. Look to the sunshine, look to whatever moves your heart and mind to come closer to Jesus, see that love, believe, and then live. Faith without works is dead.

So where do we see Jesus? I challenge you through this week to look for Jesus, who is God, who is love. To find that love and to let it move your heart and mind and action. The early church in this fourth chapter of Acts is very interesting. For those who accuse me of preaching politics, tell me something more political than this fourth chapter of Acts. "The whole group who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership or possession. There was not a needy person among them. For as many as own lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold." So I call you today my sisters and brothers in Christ, to go and sell your homes. Not really. But the idea was there, the idea that they saw everything they had as a gift from God, and they shared it among themselves. And that challenges us to see where we are sharing ourselves, our lives, and our possessions. And is it being done for the love of God? For the love of Christ, for love itself?

What they did was an act of love. It was the only way they survived, and it's why we still have a church today to gather in. So I challenge you again this week to look for where you see Christ. Look for where you see God; look for where you see love. And let it move you, let it comfort you

through this darkness. Let it give you light to light your path. And may that path lead you to making the world a better place by seeing things through the eyes of Christ. That's what I believe belief is. And then we can hear the words, and it won't sound as goofy as it does in today's text. Peace be with you; because that's where we find peace: in the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Amen