

November 6, 2022
"The Long Line of Love"
Psalm 17:1-8 / Luke 6:20-31
Pastor Tim Emmett-Rardin

Just a mini-sermon this morning, a sermon junior if you will, in light of everything else happening today – celebrating our saints, welcoming new members, and shortly, sharing the sacred Communion meal together.

Love is the theme today, though I suppose it's ultimately the theme every Sunday; and by divine standard, should be our theme every day.

With All Saints' Sunday, we recall and rejoice in the love we have received and learned from our saints, our ancestors – and they from theirs, stretching back the full breadth of human history. We are not alone. We stand on the strength of their shoulders, and the long line of love continues to run in and through us as would-be, sometimes saints.

In the reception of new members, we affirm and reaffirm our faithful commitment to that love as members of one universal Body, to practice that love with each other as members of this church, this community. We are not alone. We stand on the strength of each other's shoulders, and the long line of love continues to run in and through us as those who recognize that we belong to each other as we belong to God.

In the sharing of bread and cup, we remember the love of Jesus embodied in a simple meal with his friends, his would-be followers. We remember the love of Jesus literally embodied on a cross; love, that transcended the cruelty of the cross. We are not alone. We stand on the strength of Jesus' shoulders. And the long line of love that stretches all the way back to the divine handiwork of Creation, that renewed itself in Jesus' life and death, continues to run in and through us as would-be followers.

I say "long line of love" because, you know, it's alliteration. It's fun. It has a sweet ring to it. LONG LINE OF LOVE!

But I invite you to picture a rich, colorful tapestry – woven together with the unending thread, the yarn, of divine love. A tapestry with God at the loom, first woven by God but

which continues to grow as we continue to grow in love. The weaving needle passed down to us in faith by Jesus, passed down through the generations of saints past and present.

That makes us all artists, co-artists with God, with Jesus, with all the saints, in the ongoing expression of love.

Today's gospel lesson is the so-called "Sermon on the Plain" – a parallel to Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" found in Matthew. Maybe Jesus' most well-known words. And its theme is also love. And really, the perseverance of love through adversity. Through the worst the world throws at it. Love as Jesus loved, as God loves, is not easy.

The sermon begins with a series of blessings, for those who are literally poor, hungry, who weep. Those who are poor, hungry, who are weeping NOW – not spiritually speaking, as the Sermon on the Mount emphasizes. Even blessings when people hate you for loving like Jesus did – "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven," which is to say, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of love that is further realized right here and right now whenever we extend that long line of love.

The blessings are followed by a series of contrasting "woes" – the reminder, always, that we ultimately reap what we sow.

And then Jesus takes a deep dive into the nature of divine love, love extended even to perceived enemies, to those who hate you, curse you, abuse you. In the verse that immediately follows our text, he says, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?" This is love at its hardest.

"If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt."

Arguably the most misunderstood verse in the Bible. Without trying to unpack it fully here, let's just note that it is not a literal invitation to concede to violence or abuse. To do so, as one commentator puts it, is to confuse "love with acquiescence." True love, of course, always acts to end abuse – for the sake of the abused, but also for the sake of

the abuser. So that the abuse stops. Love is what makes it possible for the abuse to stop. And for healing to begin.

Jesus is playing here with hyperbole, and providing a visual aid, to make the point that divine love is exceedingly generous. As captured in verses 34 and 35 – again, just beyond our reading: “If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.”

Divine love is exceedingly generous. It expects nothing in return. As another commentator suggests, “Jesus challenges his listeners to love not as a strategy for gain, a *quid pro quo*, but rather for the sake of love itself – or better, for the sake of the beloved.”

Love is not about reciprocity, a “fair” exchange. Love is not a commodity to be traded. Love is not a means to an end, it is the end itself.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you,” Jesus says. What we know as the “Golden Rule.” Do to others not SO THAT they will do the same to you, or because they have already done the same to you, but for the sake of love itself. Love SO generously that you make even more space for love to flourish within and around you. “Golden” love that is infinitely gracious. Love that is beyond fairness, beyond mutual exchange. Love that keeps no accounts. Love that expects nothing in return.

And what do we call people who have given us or continue to give us glimpses into that kind of love, in both ordinary and extraordinary ways? Saints. We call them saints!

So we give thanks today for all of our saints. And at the same time, as we welcome new members among us, we are reminded that we are the ones called to continue the long line of love. We reaffirm our individual and collective commitment to practice such love with each other.

“We are called to be saints,” wrote Dorothy Day – the start, you may have noticed, of our ‘Words to Live & Love By’ in this week’s Calvary Connections, “... and we might as

well get over our bourgeois fear of the name. We might also get used to recognizing the fact that there is some of the saint in all of us."

There is some of the saint in all of us, thanks be to God!

And friends, the good news behind that truth is that we would-be saints are not alone on this love journey. In the work of continuing the long, ongoing, endless line of love, weaving the divine tapestry, we stand on the strong shoulders of our saints. On the strong shoulders of Jesus. And we stand on each other's strong shoulders as members of one Body, one family.

In that spirit, let me close with a blessing from Jan Richardson – whom some of us will be journeying with this Advent:

God of the generations,
when we set our hands to labor,
thinking we work alone,
remind us that we carry
on our lips
the words of prophets,
in our veins
the blood of martyrs,
in our eyes
the mystics' visions,
in our hands
the strength of thousands.

May we rejoice in THIS day and leap for joy, knowing that our reward is great. On earth as it is in heaven.

May it be so.