

“Owe No One Anything, Except to Love”  
A sermon preached at  
Heart of the Rockies Christian Church  
(Disciples of Christ)  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
September 4, 2011

I desired many times to know in what was our Lord’s meaning. And fifteen years after and more, I was answered in spiritual understanding, and it was said: What, do you wish to know your Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end.

So I was taught that love is our Lord’s meaning. And I saw very certainly in this and in everything that before God made us he loved us, which love was never abated and never will be. And in this love he has done all his works, and in this love he has made all things profitable to us, and in this love our life is everlasting.

*Showings*, Julian of Norwich (14<sup>th</sup> Century English Mystic)

Texts: Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18 & Romans 13:8-10

There are some passages of Scripture that speak for themselves. The preacher is tempted to read the passage, then sit down. To add anything risks taking something away from the simplicity and the weight of the text. Our reading from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome is one of these texts.

[Read Romans 13:8-10.]

At the risk of taking something away from the text...

The battle lasted about thirty minutes. Iraqi irregulars had fired Kalashnikovs, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades at the convoy from behind a sand berm about seventy-five yards away. One Marine was killed, another seriously wounded. Before they caught their breath, the Marines went to the aid of the Iraqi soldiers who had just been trying to kill them. That’s when Lance Cpl. Marcco Ware, a twenty-year old kid out of Los Angeles, came into the camera focus of John Makely, photographer for *The Baltimore Sun*.<sup>1</sup> Maybe you remember the picture, the story.

Ware and a buddy had lifted one of the wounded Iraqis onto Ware’s shoulders. Makely snapped the shot as Ware carried the enemy over 400 yards to the Marine’s aid station for medical treatment. When asked about his action, Ware said, “I just did what I was trained to do... He was in a lot of pain. He was screaming in pain. He was trying to talk to us in his language, but I couldn’t understand him. We might be there to kick

your behind, but if you're surrendering, we're there to pick you up and give you some water and help you out." Just moments before, two enemies were trying to kill each other. Now one is seeking to save the life of the other.

"I tried to be as gentle as I could," the twenty-year old U.S. soldier said.

You remember the story of Army Private First Class Jessica Lynch. She was seized on March 23, 2003, along with 14 other soldiers when their supply convoy took a wrong turn outside the town of Nasiriyah.<sup>2</sup> Her dramatic rescue from the hospital in which they kept her prisoner made all the papers. Less well-publicized was the story of how our troops were tipped off to where the Iraqi regime, still under the control of Saddam Hussein, was keeping the POW. A 32-year-old Iraqi attorney named Mohammed was on his way to see his wife who worked at the hospital where they were hiding Lynch. Mohammed noticed an unusual number of security personnel ringing the building. He passed a first-floor emergency ward and saw through the window as a Fedayeen security agent gave Lynch two open-handed slaps to the face. "I saw them hit the female soldier," Mohammed said, "and my heart stopped. I decided to go to the Americans and tell them the story."

The Iraqi attorney walked more than six miles out of Nasiriyah, along an open road in an area Marines had nicknamed "Ambush Alley." When he reached the Marine checkpoint with his hands raised high in the air, he was greeted with a curt, "What do you want?" In broken English, he replied, "Important information about woman soldier." In the days that followed, Mohammed made several risky trips to the hospital – once as U.S. bombs were being dropped. He gathered information on the number of troops and made five hand-drawn maps of the building's layout and location. He was asked why, in spite of the enormous risk, he decided to help.

"I couldn't watch the mistreatment of a fellow human being without taking action," the 32-year-old-Iraqi said.

Paul said, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, all of them, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

At a retreat last week, Scott and I were gifted to hear and interact with Miraslov Volf.<sup>3</sup> Volf is a Croatian American, a theologian in residence at Yale University's Divinity School. Volf reminded us of three foundational truths of the Christian faith, the first of which is this: God is love. Love is not just a characteristic of God, a quality of God. Love is the very nature of God's being. God... is... love.

A second fundamental truth is this: The whole of the Christian faith – all the theology, doctrine, laws, customs, rituals, stories and practices of the church *at their best*; everything that we mean when we talk about the qualities of justice and mercy and freedom and forgiveness – all of it has its genesis and its fulfillment in a life marked by love.

A third fundamental truth is this: Love is a fruit, not a labor. It can feel like a work because as a part of our maturing, our growing into a life that is flourishing, we work at love, we practice it. We try it and fail and try it again, actually succeeding every so often. But the love that embraces others and ourselves and our enemies without condition – that has the potential to draw others into a life of wholeness and joy – is the fruit of the inner transformation that comes when we allow ourselves to be bathed in God’s love for us. Paul says it’s a gift, this love, a fruit of God’s Spirit. He goes on to describe it in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of First Corinthians (vss. 4-7).

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

God is patient; God is kind; God is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. God does not insist on God’s own way; God is not irritable or resentful; God does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

May God have Love’s way in you and me, that it might be said of us...

You are patient; you are kind; you are not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. You do not insist on your own way; you are not irritable or resentful; you do not rejoice in wrongdoing, you rejoice in the truth. You bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things.

[Please read the portion of the morning’s **Invitation to Discipleship** quoted below.]

— Jeff Wright  
sersa11

### *Invitation to Communion*

So as not to think that the love Paul writes about is sentimental, soft, permissive or easy, each week we gather at this table to remember that just before his crucifixion Jesus gathered his disciples around a table where he spoke of the cost of this neighbor love. During the meal, Jesus took the bread and broke it, took the cup and shared it, as if they were his body and his blood. He said, “Take; this is my body. This my blood of the new covenant, poured out for many.” Here at the Table and at the foot of the cross, we are reminded what the real thing looks like: self-giving, generous, unilateral and without condition.

### *From the Invitation to Discipleship*

May I share some of the thoughts and feelings that stir within me when I’m reminded of God’s amazing grace, when I read a text that so simply and powerfully reveals what it looks like to follow Jesus? Maybe these feelings stir in you: gratitude; joy; and a sense of limitless possibility nurtured by my hope in God’s love.

But at times I also experience guilt, regret, even a sense of hopelessness – maybe you do, too – in recognizing how far short I fall in deserving the gift of God’s love; how far short I fall in allowing God’s love to shape my actions. These feelings can become a barrier to our receiving God’s love. They can become our excuse for not living into a life of wholeness and joy.

So for the guilt in my failures to do the loving thing, I remember Christian activist Shane Claiborne saying, “Most good things begin with a little guilt, but they never end there.”<sup>4</sup>

For the regret over the ways I’ve done something other than the loving thing, I remember Paul saying, “This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on...”

To address the sense of futility, I remember God saying, “I make all things new again.”

This morning...

<sup>1</sup> SunSpot.net, *The Baltimore Sun*, 4/5/2003

<sup>2</sup> Compiled from *The Denver Post*, p. 17A, 4/4/03, and *Rocky Mountain News*, p. 10A, 4/5/03

<sup>3</sup> The Faith and Culture Conference 2011 was hosted by Word of Life Church, St. Joseph, Missouri ([www.wolc.com](http://www.wolc.com)), at St. Malo Retreat Center, Allenspark, Colorado. Volf, Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, laid out the theses – and highlights – of two recent books he has authored: *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*; and *Allah: A Christian Response*.

<sup>4</sup> *The Irresistible Revolution: living as an ordinary radical*, p.31