



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

July 31, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

8th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Deuteronomy 24:17-22](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 25

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Romans 12:9-21](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 10:25-37](#)

The Believer Follows Christ Followers of Christ Love Their Neighbor

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

For thirty-three years now I've been preaching sermons. Twenty-eight years ago my wife gave up trying to correct my grammar. She used to get to listen to my sermons on Saturday night (if I'd run through them) and then she'd offer advice or instructive criticism and usually it was about grammar. But that ended a long time ago because my grammar is my grammar. I talk the way I talk. And I think most of you can understand me, at least those of you that stay awake. My grammar ain't going to change.

But I know enough about the English language (I think) to say this, which I believe is true. The English language is pretty imprecise in many, many ways. It's kind of a lazy language. Think about how we use the same words in so many different ways at times. I tell Paula, my wife, "I love you." I take a sip of Tim Horton's coffee in the morning and say "Man, I love this coffee." If I mean the same, exact thing about both those things, I'm in real trouble in my marriage, ain't I? It's not apples and apples at all, and yet that's how we use the word "love" in so many different ways; some that are deep and meaningful and some that are just kind of throw away lines. These clichés fall out of our mouth before we even know what we're saying.

So maybe at times, because we are so imprecise with the word "love" in our daily lives, we hear God's command to love others, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself."** We've heard that in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. We heard Jesus on Maundy Thursday over and over again, "Love one another," "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." ([John 13:35](#)) He talks about loving others so often in Scripture that maybe we just

don't think a whole lot about it. Am I supposed to love others like I love coffee? Or am I supposed to love others like I love my wife?

Well, in reality, I think Jesus gave us the answer already, didn't He? ***"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."*** ^(John 13:34) We are supposed to love like God loved us. God loved us, not because we're so lovable because you and I aren't. We are sinful wretches who are incredibly self-centered and think the whole world revolves around us, and yet our God still loved us. And Jesus came and lived perfectly because you and I don't. Jesus came and died on the cross as the punishment for our sins and the sins of the whole world. And then God loved us enough to send the Spirit into our hearts so that we believed this incredible truth. That's how we are supposed to love others.

In fact, this whole section in [Romans 12](#), what I read to you there, [Romans 12](#) starts out with, ...in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices. This is your spiritual act of worship. In the first 11 chapters, Paul had addressed a lot of the doctrine of how we are saved. He went over Law and how we are sinners. He went over Gospel and how it's not about us; it's about what Jesus did. He laid it all out and answered a lot of arguments that people might have against it. He spelled it all out in detail. And now he is saying, because God has done all of this for you, in view of God's mercy (mercy; love in action), offer your bodies as living sacrifices. How you are supposed to do it is in these paragraphs I just read to you. Be devoted to others in love. Be devoted!

Notice how he started out in what I just read to you. ***"Love must be sincere."*** Do you ever find yourself being a little bit insincere? I greet people in the morning, "How are you doing?" "I'm doing fine." "You're lying to me." "Well, I guess, yes I am." Someone said that to me this morning. We at times just give the answers we are expected to give. We don't necessarily always give sincere answers.

It's the same thing in how we love others. Sometimes our love is going through the motions and trying to look like we're doing the right thing in actually being concerned about someone else, but really we could care less. We just want to get it over with so we can move on with the rest of our day at times. This is what we are as sinners. So God reminds us to not go through the motions. Be sincere. Be devoted to others. Honor others above yourself. But man, that's hard! Honor others above myself? Do you ever find that to be a struggle? Sometimes it's easier to do in maybe some of the big things we've seen in life, but to be devoted and put it into practice and do it sincerely all the time?! I find that really hard to do.

When I'm driving out to South Dakota to see Paula and family, I have an 8-hour drive. It's a really nice drive, until you get to the cities and other side of the cities is a two-lane road. There are two-lane roads in Minnesota. You get behind a guy in a pickup, I'm assuming it's a farmer who has to drive slow to watch the crops grow. *Doesn't he know I'm in a hurry and I'm trying to get there to see my family?! Why is he slowing me*

down?! He should be worried about what is going on in my life, not me being worried about what is going on in his! It's not a big deal, but think of how hard it is to not think that the world revolves around you in so many ways, every day of your life!

Our God comes to us and says, "Honor others above yourself." That means "Quit doing that!" Sincerely honor them above yourself. Be devoted to them in love. That's so incredibly hard for us because by our nature we are incredibly selfish beasts and we all have this sinful nature that thinks everyone should listen to God and love ME above themselves, but we don't think we should love others above ourselves.

So how do we do it? Did you notice our God kind of spells it out for us? He knows we're going to need some instructions and He knows how most of us don't read instructions. So He says it right in there, real clearly. Don't lose your spiritual zeal. Keep your spiritual fervor. What does that mean? Spiritual fervor has to come from the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit comes to us and gives us the zeal, this love and this desire, to, in view of God's mercy, do what God has called us to do as He shows us our sin and He shows us the answer to our sin; as He shows us our Savior; as He reminds us that we are clothed in Christ's perfection at our Baptism. As He comes to us through the water and the wine and says "This is the body and blood that loved you this much that it took away the guilt of your sin." In view of this mercy, keep feeding your faith so that your spiritual fervor doesn't get weary, because it will. It will.

We are in the presence of our enemies yet. We have the Devil, the world and our own sinful nature that is always try to give us all the excuses and all the reasons why we shouldn't be devoted to others in love. But our God comes to us and says, "Do it because I loved you first." So the more our eyes are on the focus of God's love, the easier it will get. But you and I will never do it perfectly on this side of heaven. That's why we keep fleeing back to this precious truth that our God loves us and took away the guilt of our sins.

This whole first paragraph that we've been looking at, that's really talking about how we love those inside of the church. We are to do it all those ways that He said, and that's a challenge for us at times because even though we know they are our brothers and sisters in Christ, some of them just aren't all that lovable. I can honestly say that in my heart I believe I love every single member of our congregation. I love them and I want them in heaven with me. I don't necessarily want to go to a fish fry next Friday night with all of them. We can kind of be fingernails on a chalkboard with each other. I know I'm that way to other people too. This is what we are as sinners.

God says that's not an excuse NOT to love your brothers and sisters in Christ. If your love is sincere, you are going to work at loving those who maybe you don't like so much. But you want to act and put their interest ahead of your own and be there to keep them connected to Christ and point them to Christ and help them in tangible ways

that shows the love of Christ. Not just with words, not just with words and happy, fuzzy thoughts. Sometimes we think that's what love is, this happy, warm, fuzzy emotion. We talk about it like it's a big hole in the ground in the sidewalk and we're walking along and all of a sudden, *I fell in love*. This isn't what Jesus is talking about here. He's talking about doing things that show this love by putting your love into action and practice in your daily life with your fellow believers. That's what He is calling us to do; sincerely.

Here's the other thing that He drives home for us right at the start. ***Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*** Who decides that? Who decides what is evil? The world around us has an awful lot of different ideas about what is evil and what is good. But they don't decide. I don't decide. You don't decide. God decides what is evil and what is good and He reveals it to us in His Word. So the more we know the Word, the more we will know that I need to do what God has called me to do. I need to repent when I don't. I need to keep focused on Him and His will and not on MY idea of what is the most loving thing to do, but what HIS idea of the most loving thing to do is. Then I need to live that in my daily life.

Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. There is, in God's eyes, right and wrong. People may deny it. I may deny it in my own life. You may deny it in your own life. We come up with our excuses. But God is saying there is absolute right and wrong. If you're going to be devoted to others in love, make sure you are doing it by clinging to what God says is good.

After the first paragraph, from the second paragraph until the end, I think the Holy Spirit had Paul move outside of the church to the world around us that at times attacks us because he says, ***"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." "Do not repay anyone evil for evil." "...but overcome evil with good."*** I think that's hard for us to do, isn't it? My sinful nature wants to get back at people. You don't know how many times on those two-lane roads on the other side of Minnesota I thought in my mind about pulling around the car, passing it real quick and then slowing down to 25mph, because I want to repay evil with evil in my warped view of life at times. When someone takes a bite out of our backside and attacks us when we are doing what is good in God's eyes and the world says it's wrong and they attack us, it can become very easy to become rude and arrogant and annoying as we answer them in kind. For your sinful nature, that feels kind of good for a moment, but God says to love them. ***"...bless and do not curse." "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink."*** God says to keep on loving those who don't love you back because that's how God loved the world. That is incredibly hard to do. It's hard to do in our daily life. It's hard to do (I think) for many people on social media where we want to scream at each other in all capital letters in ways that are arrogant, rude and unloving with those who disagree with us. But that's not how we serve God.

We serve God by loving like Christ loved, by not repaying evil with evil, but working hard at staying patient, kind, loving, speaking up for God's truth, defending what is good, but doing it in love.

There is this caricature of us as Christians that we're rude, obnoxious, and judgmental and all those things and sometimes these caricatures of Christians are based in reality. Because we have a sinful nature, sometimes we are like that. If we're going to have sincere love, we have to work at not doing it. We have to work better at loving like Christ loved.

Look at what He says there at the end. There is kind of a strange phrase there. ***"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink."*** And then it says ***"In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*** Does your sinful nature hear that and go "Good! Now they are going to get their payback! I'm going to do this to make them feel bad about themselves"? That's not what God means. That might be what your sinful nature wants it to mean, but that's not what it means. Heaping burning coals on their head—I read someplace a while ago that the Egyptians did this to show their sorrow over how they had offended someone else. They put a bowl of burning coals on their head and walked with it to show that they were sorry for what they had done. I don't advise that. Kids, don't go home and try that. That's not what I'm telling you to do. I am telling you to think about this—why you want to love like Christ loved. It's the same reason Christ loved us. So that others are moved to see their sin and their need for a Savior.

When you remain patient, kind and loving with those who are not patient, kind and loving with you, eventually they might want to know why. And then you get to share this incredible truth of what your God has done for you and for the whole world and how it changes you. So you want to love like He loved you. That means you want to love others the way He did. That's how we overcome evil with good because as we imitate Christ out of love for Christ, this is our goal. Not to be right. Our goal is to connect people to Jesus. There is no greater task in our life than connecting people to Jesus: our fellow believers and those who don't yet know Him. This is why we are here. Connect people to Jesus. In view of God's mercy, make sure other people know that mercy. You and I have the privilege of being the conduits of God's love. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.