

For the Youngsters

Have a heart for each - maybe a candy heart

Tell me, what does the heart symbolize? Yes, love. I want you to know that you are loved. God loves you. People of our church love you and I love you.

I heard about a tribe in a foreign land in which a woman says to her husband on their wedding day, "I love you will all my liver." That sounds kind of weird, doesn't it? Does it to you? I like heart better.

Of course it's easy to SAY I love you. It is much more difficult to put love into action. How are some ways we can show people we love them?

Yes, we can hold their hand. We can do nice things for them. We can help them when they are in trouble.

How did God show us the he loves us? That's right. He sent Jesus into the world. You see, it wasn't enough for God simply to say He loves us.

He showed us His love. That is what He also expects out of us. Rather than simply say, "I love you will all my liver-I mean heart" we are to do good to others — everybody we meet — and put our love into action.

Amos 7:7-17; Luke 10:25-37 Pentecost 5C - Ordinary Time 15

If we don't have a clear sense of right and wrong, we live without morals. Morality comes when humans wrestle with the difference between good and evil – and seek to choose what is right. But sometimes this is really hard.

Amos, a lay-person, is one of the earliest recorded prophets, and his indictment of Israel is simple: The community is not functioning right. It's breaking down. It's not working the way it is supposed to. It's not working the way that God made it to.

Sound familiar?

When God gave the law, it was to be the foundation of *good* community. It would instruct God's people to live as a harmonious, peaceful community, full of the *shalom* of God. This harmony would stand out against pagan narcissism, individualism and selfish gratification. God's law defined the nature of the community: farmers couldn't take the whole crop, they had to leave some for the poor. Laborers, no matter where they were from, couldn't be worked seven days a week, 24 hours a day. They, too, were entitled to rest. There are plenty more laws where these came from – roughly **611** more – but the long and the short of it is that it was a way of life marked by a clear understanding of right and wrong.

It's a great plan. But, because of sin and human failing, it didn't really work out. So Amos was called to bring God's word to God's people. And God gives Amos the image of a *plumb line*.

Do you know what a plumb line is? It's nothing more than a piece of string or twine with a weight tied at one end. If you hang the plumb line from the highest part of any wall, it will invariably show the straight path because gravity doesn't lie. The weight holds the line taut, and it shows whether the bottom and the top and everything in between is holding together.

If the base of the wall and the cap aren't holding together, there is a problem. If the foundation and the pinnacle are out of whack, the whole thing is going to come down. Speaking about this passage in Amos, James Limburg wrote in his *Interpretation* commentary, "If a wall is out of plumb, it cannot do the job for which it was designed. Just as a foreman must give the order to destroy such a structure, so the Lord now announces the destruction of Israel."

Does that sound harsh?

God's judgment *does* sound harsh when we consider it apart from God's saving activity. There is always mercy and goodness with God, but God is

also clear that good can't be bad and bad can't be good. *They aren't the same thing.*

It is confusion about those points that leaves us morally out of plumb. Humans need a moral plumb line.

In my early years of ministry, I might not have said that so plainly. I was so worried about the perceived (and real!) judgmentalism of the church that using words such as *morality* seemed arrogant to me. When I was preaching in those days, it was all grace, all the time. But there can be a danger to that. Wallowing in grace has the potential to cheapen it if it doesn't shape how we live. When we pay attention to what God values, we find guidance.

Truth is a moral plumb line.

Equality is a plumb line.

Justice is a plumb line.

Non-violence is a moral plumb line.

And we need these moral plumb lines. Nowhere is that more evident than in Jesus's well-known, well-worn parable of the distressed traveler, this Sunday's Gospel passage. Jesus uses the story of the Good Samaritan to lay out a moral plumb line based on the biblical value of hospitality.

Twice, he shows the wrong thing to do — because we need to be able to tell the difference. Then, Jesus shows the right thing to do. It's simple: the Samaritan cares for the man. **We can't live a human life at arms-length.** We need to risk the mess of being part of community, and God has shown us how.

Comfort without challenge is not consistent with the call of Jesus to take up our crosses and follow him (Matthew 16:24-26). But that's not really all that

different from what God has been saying since, literally, day one. **Faith is still a call away from narcissistic individualism and suffocating self-interest to an understanding that there are more people on this planet than one.** It's still a call away from selfishness to the knowledge that there's enough to go around — if we let go of what we have.

The plumb line of faith calls us to genuine community.

The call is real. The needs are urgent. The alternative is bleak. But God's way is clear, and if we will take it, we get to join in the healing of the world.

Uniform Lesson for July 10, 2022

Scripture passage and lesson focus: John 4:46-54

If Jesus, God's Word made flesh, was instrumental in the creation of the universe, surely this same Jesus can create life out of death in our world today. This week, Jesus returns to Cana, where he made water into wine, and performs a second sign — this time at the request of a royal official whose little boy is near death (v. 46-49). Jesus once more creates and heals with a word — this time, at a distance and in a way that demands our circles of healing expand. How does this pattern of creation and re-creation help us discern where Jesus is at work today?

Healing with a word

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is the Word — spoken, embodied, incarnate. One of the mysteries of Jesus' first sign in Cana is that he never commands the water to become wine; he simply tells the stewards to fill the jars with water and take some to the chief steward (John 2:7-8). But with this second sign, the power of Jesus' words becomes more evident. Again, he doesn't explicitly command the child to become well, but he declares the good news that his presence and power makes possible, saying, "go; your son will live" (v. 50). With these words, Jesus creates a new reality and a

new cosmos where death no longer reigns supreme. He thus reveals himself as both the messenger and the message of a new era of God's work in the world. Again, God's light is shining in our darkness and the darkness will not overcome this light-made flesh.

Maybe it's important that we begin this lesson by reminding ourselves of the power of the Word in our lives as God's people. When we hear the Word proclaimed "we are called, above all, to discern Jesus Christ, receive his grace, and respond to his call with obedience. The proclamation of the Word through Scripture and sermon allows us to "encounter Jesus Christ in God's Word" and because of that we are equipped to follow him more faithfully, and are inspired to proclaim the gospel to others through our words and deeds. The Word inspires words, which lead to deeds. Through our words and actions, God's creative work continues.

Healing at a distance

One of the most interesting details of this healing story is the fact that it occurs at a distance. The official goes up from Capernaum to Cana and asks Jesus to come down with him in return, assuming Jesus must be present to heal. But clearly Jesus' presence is not bound by space, even though, here, it still seems related to time (v. 53). Jesus speaks, in Cana, and the official's son is healed, in Capernaum. Jesus speaks a word, and new life and possibilities appear: first, close at hand in a wedding in Cana of Galilee and second, at a distance, in Capernaum by the sea.

During the pandemic, we have worried a great deal about what God can and can't do at a distance. Surely there is a place for proximity and presence as we share the good news of God's healing in our words and in our deeds. However, we must not limit the power of the Word when it comes to spreading God's creative power. Too often we think of God's love revealed in Jesus as restricted to our neighborhood and our people. Here a royal official comes to Jesus and asks him to accompany him back to his hometown for healing. Jesus makes it clear that no trip is necessary. Once God's Word has been let loose, the cosmos begins to change. This is not a local, but a long-distance call and claim.

Unless you see

Jesus not only refuses to travel, but Jesus also takes a swipe at all who demand “signs and wonders” (v. 48). The “you” in this verse is plural. We, as human beings, are prone to demanding signs and wonders regarding God’s creative power in order to believe. But John’s Gospel celebrates those who come to trust in God’s resurrecting power without seeing (John 20:29). Can a parent trust Jesus’ ability to heal even if her child dies? Can we continue to trust Jesus’ ability to heal amidst the brokenness and brutality of our world today? We speak words that go out and disappear and often we can discern nothing in response. Do we stop speaking and acting? Did Jesus?

For discussion:

How can we trust Jesus’ ability to heal — across barriers of space and time?

If you are the child care giver, the parent, or grandparent, I hope these give you a way to talk about God to the children. The internet can’t do it all and I just hope that when children ask questions this resource will help you find the answers together. When questions arise is when we want the answers and the proof of that is in the number of young parents today who actually went to Christian Ed and now, have no interest in community and church. They were given answers to questions they didn’t have as yet. Find the answers to their questions together. KatieD+