

**“IT’S ALL ABOUT LOVE”**  
**Romans 13:8-14**  
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I recently read this story: *A student once asked anthropologist Margaret Mead, “What is the earliest sign of civilization?”* The student expected her to say a clay pot, a grinding stone, or maybe a weapon.

Margaret Mead thought for a moment, then she said, ‘A healed femur.’

A femur is the longest bone in the body, linking hip to knee. In societies without the benefits of modern medicine, it takes about six weeks of rest for a fractured femur to heal. A healed femur shows that someone cared for the injured person, did their hunting and gathering, stayed with them, and offered physical protection and human companionship until the injury could mend.

Mead explained that where the law of the jungle – the survival of the fittest – rules, no healed femurs are found. The first sign of civilization is compassion, seen in a healed femur.”

You might be asking... where am I, as the preacher, going with this? Is she making the case on this Labor Day weekend to lift up our health care workers, who have been on the frontlines during all these months of Covid? Sure... and I want to expand on that even more...

The anxiety and the animosity in the country, and even in our town are at a high level right now. Factions are more entrenched in these days pre-election than I can ever remember in my lifetime. And in the Christian community nationwide? It is deeply divided according to the perspective and interpretation of how our scriptures might speak to this moment at this time. How can we find our way through this time? Is there

something, anything, which can bring us together... rather than drive a wedge through us? What is the Good News?

It comes down to, and always has been about one thing... LOVE.

Love is and always has been the most radical message to counter humanity's bent on tearing down and destroying of one another. Loving neighbor as you love yourself continues to be the most countercultural message we can hear. And we need to hear it now more than ever.

The scripture reading from Paul's letter to the church in Rome, the lectionary text for us today, details how those in *that* God-constituted community to whom he was writing were to treat others. They already knew the law from the Hebrew scriptures as outlined in the 10 commandments. Paul was now saying that the law is fulfilled when one loves one's neighbor as oneself, which means one literally puts on the cloak of Jesus and lives honorably.

Loving one's neighbor as one's self. We don't see a lot of that these days...

This week, an image popped up on my Facebook feed. It was of a bald eagle soaring in the sky. On top of it was a black crow. The crow was picking at the back of the eagle's neck mid-flight. The interpretation of the picture as told by the husband of the woman who had posted it was very interesting: It said this:

*The only bird that will peck at an eagle is the crow. He sits on his back and bites his neck. The eagle does not respond or fight with the crow. It doesn't waste time or energy on the crow.*

*It simply opens its wings and begins to rise higher in the sky. The higher the flight, the harder it is for the crow to breathe and then the crow falls due to lack of oxygen.*

And then the commentary was: ***Stop wasting your time with the crows. Just take them to your heights and they'll fade.***

***This is a great reminder to surround yourself with people that fuel your soul, gives you oxygen.***

The post ended there. It was meant to be a self-help message to the followers of a woman who has a religiously-based, Christian business following.

I thought about that for most of the rest of that afternoon. And I wondered how the scripture passage from this morning, which ironically was chosen years ago by scholars for this day might inform an alternative interpretation?

First... the implication of our scripture text begins with the assumption that we are always in community. The Law quoted implies that has been the case from the early days of the life of the children of Israel. This text was written hundreds of years later... and the idea still is, we do not live alone. Our lives, **whether we like it or not** are inextricably interwoven with others... those whom we like and those who really annoy us. Those who are similar to us and those who are as different from us as we can imagine. But here's the thing... we don't get to pick and choose who we are to love... we are to love everyone. We may not LIKE them or agree with them, but we are to love them. Why? Because we are all made in the image of God.

Now don't get me wrong, if someone is abusing you... you remove yourself and get to safety. It is not the loving thing to do to allow them to continue to engage in abusive behavior. Someone else who is not in that relationship may be the one to come in and love that person back to wholeness... AFTER making sure the abuse stops.

But the scripture says love your neighbor AS you love yourself... so, for some, spending time learning what it means to love oneself and to see themselves as God sees them, is the first order of business. And if you and I are really honest... I think many of us in this day and age DON'T really love ourselves or see ourselves as God sees us... so it is impossible to love others the way God wants us to. In fact, perhaps all we need to do to prove it is look at the way people are treating one another... and that gives us the answer as to how much we love ourselves.

Continuing with that thought, back to the eagle and crow. I asked the woman who posted it, what if, what if... the eagle had enough self-love and was whole enough to help that crow... so that it didn't need to pick at him/her? Isn't that perhaps what we are asked to do, as difficult as it is, especially in this day? Aren't we being asked to listen to voices which have been silenced for so many years... asking for justice?

Let me conclude with one final story... it comes from **Tales of the Hasidim:**

*An old rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun. "Could it be," asked one of the students, "when you can see an animal in the distance, and tell whether it's a sheep or a dog?" "No," answered the rabbi. Another asked, "Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it's a fig tree or a peach tree?" "No," answered the rabbi; "Then when is it?" demanded the students. "It is when you look on the face of any man or woman and see that it is your brother or your sister. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night."*

As tempting as it may be to take sides and stoke fear and embroil ourselves in bitter conflict, Jesus tells us our role is to love one another; to be ambassadors of reconciliation; we are to follow Christ's example.

How can those who profess to follow him then abandon and shun others?

“We need one another and God calls us to love one another. The greatest commandment is proclaimed for such a time as this.” (Jill Duffield: Presbyterian Outlook)

May it be so...Alleluia! Amen~~