

February 21, 2010

Grove Presbyterian Church

Received an email the other day. I give fair warning, if its email, its public domain.

It was harmless. Mostly harmless. Came from a fellow critical of the folks residing at the Gate House, a ministry Grove supports housing homeless individuals and families. Don't picture the extreme. Picture instead the single mother with two kids whose grandma can't handle them in the trailer anymore so she moves in with a girlfriend and her boyfriend – and maybe a kid or two -- in a one bedroom apartment.

Besides I bet 75% know that if it weren't for family support, we'd have homeless kids.

“Why don't they get a job?” he wrote.

Fair question.

Tried to explain that 30% do work. Those who can work but don't must look for work. The Gate House also houses senior citizens and those on disability.

I tried to correct his assumption that work is readily available around here. It isn't.

Also, if they do find a job, the government itself is the problem for some. Even if they do pick up part time wages, it can lift them into an income bracket that makes them ineligible for medical assistance.

It's complicated.

I note the irony that the fellow uses a state email address.

I then went on to explain how one of the bigger problems for our folks looking for work or commuting to work is the lack of transportation.

Would you like, I added, to help provide transportation on a regular basis?

He did reply. He said he hoped he didn't offend me.

It takes a lot to offend me. I'm not that proud. If you don't want to be offended, don't take offense.

He did offer to help out with transportation . . . at \$10 an hour.

So easy to criticize. I'm doing it right now. Especially when you're one of the haves. Reminds me of those on disability or Medicare complaining about proposed health care changes.

Harder, but far more rewarding, is to stop judging and actually come up with solutions.

After all, they are your neighbors.

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Riddle, riddle me rhee. Do you see what I see?

Is there a place for me? I'm not like you. Do I fit in?

Hey, why do I have to fit in?

Who is your neighbor? Let's show hands by region.

Who's home is:

- Downtown Danville?
- Riverside?
- Rush, and that'a way?
- Bald Top?
- Northumberland way?
- Old Mahoning Township?
- Deerfield?
- Ivy Manor?
- Strawberry Fields and Red Lane?
- Whisper Hills or Welsh Hills?
- Valley Township and north of here?
- Cooper Township and beyond?
- West Hemlock

These are those who need more than your judgment

More than your casual politeness

Single (and tired of being reminded of it), divorced, sick, grieving, wounded, wondering,

hesitant, disabled, angry, scared, scarred

It's not a matter of them adjusting to you.

Fitting in.

Far more interesting it would get if we accommodated ourselves to each other?

And not just them.

The others too.

Riddle, riddle me rhee...

Do you see someone who needs a house in which to put their home?

All God's children deserve a home.

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Loving with a Christ-like love
Those who live in the Gate House
Those in the White House
Those in the house next door

Not an option. Nothing safe about this love. No safe investment. It requires vulnerability.

There comes a time to stop sticking your tongue into the sore tooth to check see if it still hurts.

I understand God as someone who wants the best for us, but who also wants us to live righteously. I also feel that above all, God wants us to love him and our fellow human beings.

We tend to think of love as squishy, sentimental, cute, emotional. That's what often gets us into trouble
A love which is more our need to be loved
Which in some cases is the way of most love
Need to be needed
So very human
Sometimes honest and innocent
The way a hurting little girl reaches out to be loved by mommy
She depends on you
The way we depend on God
Need love
Need God
Need each other

Where it gets annoying is when the need is less than honest.
No longer child-like but childish
Obnoxious.
Demanding and greedy
The kind that gives mostly in order to get
Manipulating by being giving
So desperate
So controlling
Fickle and self-centered
I give, I give, I give – please notice me!
See how much I do, you should be grateful!

Which has a wonderfully perverse way of either raising up 'takers' for children or finding 'takers' for mates.

You want to give – great, because I’m very glad to take
The kind of human love that turns the illusion of love back toward serving me
The god, the idol, that is me and my needs

Love in the Bible, however, is tough, resilient, as feisty as a terrier, as loyal as a Labrador.

Compassion
Benevolence
Indwelling
Compelling
Suffering
No conditions
No expectations

Godly love, not our kind of hot-house human loving. Our human loves have a way of either vanishing or become demonic.

We need Godly love, a gift received.

Love shaped by Christ on the cross
Love manifested by Jesus on the cross
Love shown in His flesh on the cross

Full measure
Nothing held back
No bargaining
No expectations
No self-consciousness
The unconditional instinct
Costly as costly is

Nothing squishy or sentimental about this
Nothing safe
Like a lion roaming the savannah
Nothing tame about it.

More like a mother’s love for her child. Ferocious. Unconditional gift-love.
For a mother’s love would be willing to die without a wink for the life that depends on her. In fact, when we do bring life into the world our old life does die.

Which brings us to our New Testament Lesson:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved

us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

It's more than the message of these words. It's about the fellow who wrote them.

For it is old John who wrote them. Though once upon a time there was a young John still tucked up inside the old wrinkled skin.

Petulant

Indignant

Ambitious

Big bad John

Angry when a town rejects Jesus and his disciples, so he wants Jesus to blast the city.

Later lobbying for Jesus to appoint him and his brother as Jesus' second and third in command when Jesus claims the throne and becomes ruler

Young John is arrogant the way the young should be arrogant.

Feisty and confident.

That sense of taking on the world, and they're the ones to do it.

Until the years and paunch and grey hairs teach them a self-deprecating sense of humor.

Compare big bad young John to the old pastor John, the John who penned this letter

More a sermon for his congregation

An old pastor who's been around the block

Who knows what matters

What is best.

How it all comes down – not to power, or control -- to love. Agape-love. The love shown and invented by the Christ.

When we are young we begin assuming that the love you deserve is because you are attractive enough or clever enough or bright enough or accomplished enough or generous enough or loving enough to be loved whether by lover or by God. I make myself special, thus I ought be loved.

Godly love is not even based upon how needy you are to be loved.

Shocking to realize the sort of love we need is not the sort of love we want.

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We speak of the deep magic of dying love.

Undying love is easy. You only need words.

Dying love is love that matters, a love that tells Kaelyn she means everything.

Is every thing

The rest of my life is for you  
Because you mean every thing, I give my life for you.