Letting Our Lives Speak
Micah 6:6-8, 1 Corinthians 13

There is a story about a young woman running a ranch in the West during the 1800’s who fell in love with a handsome cowboy. The woman is deeply frustrated by the cowboy’s repeated failure to profess his love for her. Her grandfather listens carefully as she complains, vowing she will not marry a man who never says a word about love. The wise grandfather then points to the new front steps the cowboy built for her house;...then he reminded her of the way he searched all night to rescue her little brother;...how he braved a blizzard to roundup her livestock;...and the way he constantly defended her rights against a greedy neighbor – well, the list went on. Grandfather said, “My dear, this man has demonstrated more love and respect for you than some women find in a lifetime. What he’s done says he loves you louder than any words! The rest of us see this...why can’t you?”

That story is a reminder that love isn’t just about what we feel or say,...but how we live, what we DO. Whether it’s the love of God, love of neighbor, love of self, love is about the decisions we make, the duties we assume, the risks we take, the focus we have. Let’s listen again to what Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 13:4-8:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...”

Love is about what we do even when doing it is hard. There is a story about a woman named Rachel. She had some difficult years as her husband’s dementia progressed. Gradually his duties with the house and yard work were taken on by her. Additionally, she watched him retreat into another world, constantly on guard against his wandering off unexpectedly.
Finally, it came time to find a facility, make the arrangements and move him there. It was very hard to do; her world had been centered around his care for a long time. She had a really difficult time adjusting to his absence in spite of how overwhelming it had been to care for him. But love helps us do hard things and those of you who have gone through this or seen your family deal with this, know how wrenching it can be...It isn’t all about feelings...it’s about doing, doing what love requires us to do for another human being. Thankfully, God gave Rachel courage and strength to do it!

Here in this place I’ve heard ample testimony about what the church means to them, how their lives have been blessed by families, mentors, church members who value them, love and support them, walk with them as they grow in faith. The way you - the congregation - have lived and supported each other has spoken volumes about Christianity to the rest of us. Centuries ago, Micah said that what God really wants from us is that we are “to act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God”. That’s a tall order even if it isn’t lengthy. One of the most powerful ways to absorb and understand Micah’s wisdom is to know real people whose lives reveal a steadfast commitment both to that call and the call of Jesus for us to “love one another as I have loved you.”

I read an article by Shan Cretin, General Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee. In it, she affirmed that the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) does what it does because it is Quaker, and out of that framework of approaching problems and challenges she says: “our experience has confirmed the power of love to transform lives, not just the lives of those with whom we work, but our own lives.” She describes how the AFSC begins its work in a community by listening before they take action. It sounds simple, but listening to others can be painful, difficult work.

The current American political climate is adversarial in so many places: viewpoints polarized, judgments pronounced, loyalties questioned. Some have almost made a
national pastime of listening for our political leaders and public officials to mis-speak, to reveal too much or the wrong thing. The bigger the error, the louder the other side rejoices, pouncing on mistakes that can be exploited. While it is not wrong to differ with others, how we treat them matters.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians describes his desire for them to get along better among themselves, to find a way to cope with their differences. In chapter 12, he used the example of working together, like the parts of our bodies that work together for the good of the whole. Then in the introduction to chapter 13, he wrote about the merits of love, as a sort of yardstick by which we could measure our behavior toward others and build community, calling it “the most excellent way” (1 Cor 12:31b). Those words are worth hearing yet again:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails…” (1 Cor. 13:4-8)

In another article by Shan Cretin, she tells of a program being developed in Burundi and Rwanda by Quakers and others, called “Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities”. It was apparent that both the perpetrators and victims of the horrible violence there needed healing. So they brought together the Hutus and Tutsis - former combatants – for 3 day workshops with three goals: to learn about the traumas, to learn to listen to each other’s stories, and to learn the beginnings of trust so essential to healing in both groups. One of the Quaker workers, said “When you sow love, understanding, and forgiveness, you harvest peace. When you sow mistrust, you harvest revenge/violence.” It is her faith that enables and facilitates this vital process, her life speaking the wisdom of Quaker leader George Fox who said, “Let your lives preach, let your light shine”.

We certainly could have tackled other critical questions this morning - ones that trouble faithful people of goodwill of everywhere...such as:

*What can we do to reduce and eventually eliminate violence on our streets, in our homes, between countries?

*What can we do to tone down the viscous rhetoric which tears at the fabric of our democracy by demonizing our opponents and minimizing our own flaws?

*What can we do to find a just and peaceful path through the problems of immigration, and threats to our environment, while protecting our children from abuse, pornography, human trafficking, and the devastation of illegal drugs?

Those are very heavy questions, without easy answers.

Because the word love is used so many ways in English, we may get stuck on the “feelings” aspect, like the young woman frustrated by her cowboy’s silence. However, as I read Scripture and reflect on the life and teachings of Jesus, I’m convinced that the meaning of love comes truly alive in what we do, more than in what we say or how we may feel at any given moment.

The Quaker lady said it best: “Love has the power to transform lives, not just others but our own.” That isn’t just a job for Quaker activists, Christian Peacemaker Teams, BVSers! It is God’s call to you and me, where we are: to unleash the power of love, to tackle those heavy questions we listed, letting our lives speak boldly, prophetically, joyously, of God’s love, the love Jesus showed and shared, the love St. Paul points to as the best foundation on which to build peaceful community. We could make an ENORMOUS difference in the world, one life at a time...we REALLY COULD!

May the Holy Spirit help us renew and maintain our determination to put love into action “for the glory of God and our neighbor’s good”. Amen.
Clay Z. Moyer

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