

GRACE CHURCH
EPIPHANY 4 - C (RCL)

Honesdale, PA
3 February 2019

Jeremiah 1: 4-10
Psalm 71: 1-6
1 Corinthians 13
Luke 4: 21-30

The HARDEST of these IS LOVE

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In the floor of the beautiful Victorian chapel of the Good Shepherd
at General Theological Seminary that hallowed place in New York
are wonderful mosaics which intersect at the crossing.
Medallions with the Seven Cardinal Virtues process up the aisle:
prudence, wisdom, justice, temperance, fortitude, courage and love,
(all written in Latin, of course)
And across the transept arms are the three Theological Virtues
of St. Paul's Love Chapter read today:
Faith, Love and Hope.

The two lists intersect before the Altar with the one word in common:
Love.

At the center of the Cross is Love.
Well, there's a sermon in its own right.

Bill Lewellis, who served many years as our Diocesan theologian,
signs his e-mails with a quote from his professor: Bernard Lonergan:
"Be attentive; be intelligent; be reasonable; be responsible;
Be in love; and, if necessary, change."

Of course, it's necessary.

Love requires change.

Complacency is not allowed.

There's advice I give to pre-marital couples,

Love who this person is now, because you won't change him.

(Why is it always the woman who thinks she can change the man!?)

But guys, the trick is, love requires that you do change.

Stop clanging that gong and be in love, and change.

Lonergan does have something though.

Love requires all those things he mentioned:

Be attentive;

be intelligent;

be reasonable;

be responsible;

change,

and be *in* love.

Two other Jesuit scholars Daniel Harrington and James Keenan
in their book Paul and Virtue Ethics argue for seven "new virtues,"
mirroring Lonergan's:

be humble,
be hospitable,
be merciful,
be faithful,
be reconciling,
be vigilant,
and be reliable.

Paul and Virtue Ethics, 2010. Rowman & Littlefield; pp. 125–26.

I'd like just one virtue:

“Be civil.”

Although in the prophet Micah is asked,
“What does the Lord require of you, O Mortal,
but to do justice; love kindness; and walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8

Then we come to Jesus:

“Love God with your whole being;
and love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

Mark 12:29-31

There's that Love thing, again.

You'd think God means it.

Faith, Hope and Love

The greatest of these - and the hardest - is Love.

Jesus summed up the whole of Mosaic Law in that one word.

I wonder if why they ran him out of town?

He made the covenant with God way too simple -
and very difficult at the same time.

They and we don't want to hear about loving our neighbor,
for we aren't loving God rightly until we do.

Years ago someone handed me a Christmas present.

It was hand-made - they had taken the time and the effort and the love -
365 pieces of paper -
with a typed inspiration for each day of my coming year.

One day had this:

Faith - makes all things possible;

Hope - makes all things bright;

Love - makes all things easy.

It's nice, but I've usually found that love makes things more difficult.

But maybe I don't take things in the right order.

Maybe I try to love too much

without first having the Faith, which makes all things possible.

Then living in the brightness of Hope which Faith surely brings.

And finally in the light of Faith and Hope,
I can see better how to Love.
Love may not make things easy
but it does make life way more worthwhile.
And isn't it true that anything worthwhile is worth working for.

Be attentive - open your eyes to the one you love.
Well, and open your ears, too.
Pay attention to someone else's music,
rather than your own clanging noise.

Be intelligent - study the needs of the one you love.
Think about what is right and good and true,
as God would see them,
not as you would desire.

Let love be God's desire.

Be reasonable - that takes compromise and compassion.
Use your head, find Godly, loving, creative solutions to problems,
especially those things that would seek to tear you apart.

And be responsible -
oh, that is a hard one, for each of us.

It does matter what you do,
but we face the reality that we are but human
and make mistakes - well, once in a while, at least.

And when you make a mistake, a wrong decision, a stupid choice,
own up to it
rather than trying to cover it up
with more wrong choices.

And change.

Love may not make things easy,
but it does make life way more interesting.
worthwhile - love makes life worthwhile, I mean.

Faith, Hope and Love abide these three.
And the greatest, the hardest, the most worth-while,
'cause it's in two lists,
and has a whole chapter,
the greatest of these is Love.

No, it has a whole Book - the Bible.
Maybe we have some studying to do.
AMEN.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

Chinese gong

"Can't hear you. The clanging in my head is too loud!"

Games and videos.

Music on your play-list.

How often are you told to take your eyes off that screen,
and the buds out of your ears?

I have a friend who when we're hiking always has music blaring.

And of course I holler at him,

because I want to hear the sounds of the forest around me.

"You're not paying attention to Nature -
you're not loving Creation."

"But I *am* loving my music."

And I just shake my head and walk ahead of him.