



## SUNDAY SERMON

# Reconciling Love - Within and Without

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As her mother lay dying, she ventured to reassure her by saying, 'It will be wonderful; in heaven, everyone we love will be there.' But her mother said, 'No, that's not how it works. It is more wonderful than that, for in heaven, I will love everyone who is there.' (var. on Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*)

In heaven we will love everyone who is there. It's not a question of bringing along our favorites. By the mercy and grace of God, we shall arrive someday at a time and place in which we love everyone. Reconciliation and restoration are the ultimate purposes – the deep desire – of God – for our lives and for creation. In heaven you will love everyone who is there.

Now, there are some folks that I'm not ready to love just yet. (Most folks, I don't even know! – but strangers are easier.) It's the ones I know I don't love that are tougher. That's how I know that heaven is a gift of God's grace – and that I'm not yet there!

I don't know how long we have to wait for God to manifest the glory of heaven, but I know the present is ripe with relationships that need tending, ripe for the work of moving from here to heaven, ripe for taking steps to reconcile ourselves to one another.

Historically, Lent was a season when those who, because of their prior sinfulness had been literally, physically cast outside the circle of the community, were invited to repent, amend their lives, and thereby, be restored to the fullness of fellowship and grace. This is a season when the church invites each of us to be particularly intentional about renewing and restoring our relationship with God, with our neighbor, and with our selves.

You may know of some broken relationships that need healing and restoring.

A good place to begin is within ourselves – by seeking to reconcile ourselves with those aspects of ourselves from which we – at the moment – have cut off.

The landscape within is populated by a host of voices. Often this is most apparent when we are facing an important decision. In such a circumstance, a friend once counseled me: imagine that you have within you an entire council of advisors. In decision-making, each member plays his or her role: the cautious one meticulously weighs options, the whimsical dreamer, the conservative guardian, the analyzing calculator, the anxious one seeking reassurance, and the spontaneous one leaping into the unknown.

For lots of reasons we may or may not ever know, we have grown over time to respect and heed some of these voices, to view some aspects of ourselves as strengths and some as weaknesses. We can blame those who prompt us to feel ashamed or thank those who help us find inner strength. Perhaps we listened too often to the spontaneous voice and had a great time, with disastrous results. Or we took that early lesson about looking both ways before crossing the street too

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### DATE

Lent I  
Sunday, Feb. 18, 2018

### PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie Laughlin

### VERSE

Mark 1:9-15

much to heart, and we find ourselves perpetually stuck on the curb anticipating an unseen threat. There are passions too. Both healthy - and not; creative - and destructive. Promptings that moved me to generous and heroic deeds, as well as promptings that led to my self diminishment.

So now I have within me these different aspects of myself.

It is not unlike the way we arrange society. There are those whose behavior we recognize as good, inspiring, or deserving of our respect. Just as there are those we have put away because they are bad or different – or because we are afraid. We put them somewhere so we do not have to see or deal with them. Some, we put in literal prisons, shelters, or medical facilities, physically segregating and containing. Others, we segregate economically, politically, or socially. We do what it takes – by turning a blind eye, by structuring our federal and local budgets, by feeding tribal narratives – so we don't have to see those people, or see them as part of us.

Just because we do not see the people waking up in prison or in a homeless shelter this morning, does not mean that they have ceased to exist. I was playing hide and seek last week with a four year old. She hid – in plain view – but could not see me, and assumed I could not see her. We hide people – in plain view – because we don't want to see them any more.

Or we see them – but only as caricatures, only as emblematic of “their sort” or representative of that position. These days, the chasms between us yawn grievously wide.

God is weeping for her lost children. We may not see them, but God sees; sees them and seeks them out to love and to console. Right this moment, just as God is present with love and grace in the murderer's cell-block, God is present in every heart and soul.

As this is true, so also is God present with love and grace in those places in your heart and soul and mind that you have shunned and closed off. God is in those darkened cells, where you are serving a sentence for a crime once committed, for a relationship fractured, where you are shaking from an addiction you cannot shake, where you weep with shame for the ways you have debased your body and soul. God is in those places, with tears of compassion, arms of love. With healing grace, forgiveness, and new life.

God not only loves the parts of ourselves that we love or that others love. God loves – most especially – the parts of ourselves that we fear or despise. It is in these hidden places that God's grace is stirring with possibility and life. In heaven you will love everyone who is there.

Just shy of forty days from now, when we gather on Easter morning, we hear about the small band of women who stayed with Jesus until the end, and who now come early to the tomb with spices to anoint the body. Mystified to find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. While they stood, perplexed, two men in dazzling apparel appeared and asked, “why do you seek the living among the dead?”

The answer to this question (not given) is because they were not looking for someone living. They did not know that there could be life in that dark and hidden place. They had seen the stone rolled over the entrance, had buried hope forever. Things dead and buried stay that way. Or not. By the power of God's love Jesus was raised. Like the women, we must now go with tears of love and seek those places where we believe the dead lie buried. Buried they may be, but in Christ shall all be made alive.

The Church's Great Commission, received from the risen Christ, is to “Go and make disciples of all nations.” That commission, we believe, sends us forth to proclaim God's love to all the dark corners of the world. We do well to hear this commission as a charge to go forth not only externally, but also internally. Embark upon this season of Lent and travel first your inner landscape: to bring the the Good News of God's love to that terrain within. Seek out the dark corners, the prisons and tombs where the forgotten lie in fear.

Do not go with pity, judgment, or anger as if you alone bear the light. Go with trust, humility and courage. Go with light and grace; trust that God will lead you. Remember that God is already in that place, that even if you are fearful or ashamed God loves, deeply loves and cherishes, those dark and wounded places within.

Take heart; go forth this Lent with courage, gently probe the forgotten corners, ask God to roll away the stone, to bring light and life to that within and without which now lies buried. Amen.

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