

Love from the Center of Who You Are

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Sometimes scripture is hard to understand. With our modern lenses, we try to understand ancient stories and the history around them. We feel like archeologists digging for fossils, trying to find the truth of our texts and try to connect it to what is going on in the world around us.

Today is not one of those texts. Today is the kind of scripture where it's not hard to figure out what it's trying to say, no. The hard part is actually doing it. Love can be hard some times. And I don't mean romantic love, although that can have it's trials, too. I mean the kind of love we have here at church for each other. The kind of love we have for our family members. Our chosen family, our closest circle of friends. If you're lucky, it's the kind of love you have for your co-workers. The kind of love that does what Romans 12 is talking about: the kind of love that rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep.

But it takes work to get to that kind of relationship with others. It takes time. It takes trust. It takes tests. Some friends come fast, others more slowly. But--when you get to that point, what a blessing that kind of love can be.

Here's the problem. Many of us only get to that kind of love with people who think like we do. Who look like we do. Who believe like we do. Who talk like we do. Who go to the same grocery store we do. Who have kids who go to the school that our kids go to.

And when we do that, when we only rejoice with people who are like us and weep with people who are like us, we can look out at the world and see people rejoicing or see people weeping who we think shouldn't be weeping. Or not weeping the way we weep or think one ought to weep. We don't understand how rejoicing looks to people who aren't like us. Or how weeping looks.

But that doesn't mean they shouldn't be weeping. It just means we haven't done the work of being in relationship with them enough to get it. And if we take Romans seriously, this section is often called "the mark of a true Christian." And oh what a loaded term that is right now--Truth. Christian. What does that look like in 2020?

Many of us know the now famous story from one of my favorite Presbyterian Ministers, Mr. Rogers. Mr. Rogers told his neighbors one day, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" Those helpers are who we are called to be. We cannot magically stop bad things from happening in this world. But we can speak up when we see something. We can support our neighbors when they are in trouble. We can use our voice and our votes to elect people who have beliefs that line up with what we believe Christ is calling us to be. We can be a good neighbor.

Back to the question--what does a true Christian look like in 2020? A good neighbor? A helper? I think they look like Anthony Huber. He was a 26 year old man who lived in Kenosha, Wisconsin. If you've been watching the news this week, you've heard that city's name. An african american man there, who was known as Jacob Blake, was the latest victim in the terror of police brutality that has been facing our country for decades, but has been on the mainstage of conversation this summer and in the past couple of years. Jacob Blake came from a family of activists. His grandfather was a notable pastor and fought for housing equity in Evanston. Jacob was shot, in front of his children, in the back as he was getting into his SUV after, what the media is reporting now, trying to break up a conflict between two friends.

Almost immediately following the video's release, protests erupted. And on the second night of that protest, a 17 year old boy showed up with an illegally obtained AR-15 and shot and killed at least two protestors. When the first shot rung out, a man named Anthony Huber ran toward the shooter with his skateboard and tried to stop him. He was shot and died. Anthony saw trouble and ran toward it. He put his life on the line. He saw a scary thing and was a helper. A hero. Who, by the way, I know nothing of his faith. He may not believe in Christ at all and still be an example to us of a true christian that Romans outlines for us.

We mourn with the people of Kenosha, Wisconsin. We mourn with Anthony's family. With Jacob Blake's family. With black siblings all over this country who see these videos and when they watch them, they see themselves. Their brothers. Their fathers. Their friends. Their family.

We mourn with them because we are family. We are kinfolk. Romans tells us that we are. Romans tells us to let our love be genuine. Or as one of my favorite translations, the Message, translates Romans to say: love from the center of who you are. It goes on to say, don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

It's so easy to look around us and to look at the news and wonder if evil has won. To wonder if there's even anything we can do. We can sometimes feel small in light of so much darkness.

And yet, God calls us to be a light. God calls us to love from the center of who we are. God calls us to be like Anthony Huber. God calls us to cry with Jacob Blake. This love is one that calls us to put ourselves, our bodies, our money, our investments, our comfortability, all of it, on the line for one who is weeping, whether it looks like our weeping or not, whether we agree with the conclusions or not, we can weep that black lives do not matter in this country. We can weep that other lives have been lost for standing up for children of God. We can weep for Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and Tamir Rice and Michael Brown and Emmitt Till and so many names that we will never know or could never name the whole list.

So we weep today. And we get to work, the work of loving from the center of who we are, tomorrow. Amen.