

## A Be-loving Community I

August 5, 2018

In the letter to the church in Ephesus the writer pleads,

*I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

This is not a unique request found in the letters of the New Testament written to the early church communities. From its beginning, the church community was to be a place where people treated one another according to the way of love. From Jesus' commandment to "Love one another as I have loved you," to Saint Paul's late life profession to the church in Corinth, "*No matter the legacy of work and accomplishments for which I am known, if there was not love, they are vain and lost.*" According to the first generation of disciples who followed the way of Jesus, the way of love was not just something, the way of love was everything.

While spending his final years in exodus upon the Island of Patmos, The disciple, John, who held the distinction as Jesus' most beloved friend, wrote to the church in his generation, "*Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating, disrespecting, alienating, discounting, dismissing, verbally, mentally, or physically abusing, neglecting... a brother or a sister, is still in the darkness. BUT, whoever LOVES a brother or a sister, lives in the light, and in such a person there is no darkness.*"

In his letters to the churches, we often read St. Paul addressing the relationships shared between members of the church. My favorite is found in the letter to the church in Colossae, "*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven you. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect (mature) harmony.*"

As I was presenting the messages in June related to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's call to being the Beloved Community, much of the message was how the church conducts herself within the world around her. So many people in our emerging, post-modern culture find the church and Christian message to be a hard and unfriendly and unwelcoming place. The church is seen as a bastion of harsh and discriminating attitudes that promote inequality, injustice, and even hatred to whole people groups. And so, Michael Curry is calling us to be a place that transforms the relationship between church and culture from being separate and condescending, to being engaged, relevant, and compassionate.

As I was preparing and offering my thoughts in June, I kept thinking about how we ARE and ARE NOT being a beloved community to one another. What is the condition of the

relationships we share within this parish? My own sense told me that the bonds that bind us together as one parish community, committed to the ways of faith, hope, and love through the life and teachings of Jesus, have been stretched and taken for granted. I believe time, conversation, and reflection ought to be given to how we are “be-loving to one another” as we seek to be Beloved Community in our world.

We are a family here at St. Andrew. And like all families, we go through times of change. I remember growing up in a family of eight, and being the youngest of that family, there were distinct seasons. There was a season when we were all together at table, around the TV, at holidays, going places together. And then, there were seasons when members of the family were all going in different directions. Families never remain the same, they change. We have changed, and as we discern how to be a Beloved Community to our city and world today and tomorrow, I, like the apostle Paul, plead for us to be worthy of our calling and commit ourselves to the way of love, the way of patience and gentleness, bearing with one another and listening to one another. Because whatever we do, and whatever we might have reason to boast or commend ourselves, if we do not do these things in love, they are vain and lost. Brothers and sisters, let us love one another in the way that Jesus instructed his disciples to love one another.

As I return from taking some time away, I am in better health than when I stepped away. I wish the same for our parish life together. To be healthy, vital, filled with the life giving force of love. A love that respects and affirms. A love that appreciates and gives thanks. A love that listens and gives heed. A love that bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things for the sake of building strong the bond of family. A love that forgives. A love that sacrifices. A love that embraces and welcomes. A love that nurtures and cares. A love that celebrates our differences even while cherishing and recognizing the strength of our unity as one parish committed to being beloved community. A love that does not seek its own preference but seeks to be part of a divine community committed to the way of faith, of hope, and of love. Recognizing the greatest of these three is love.

And so, I return to you with renewed energy and confidence to pursue with you the way of love.

Amen