

Be-loving Community II

August 12, 2018

We are committed to being a Beloved Community amidst the city of Kokomo. It begins with being a loving community to one another. We accept St. Paul's admonition to the young church in Corinth to pursue love. In his letter to the Corinthians he writes, Faith, Hope, and Love...these are the things that remain, and the greatest of these is love.

Bishop Curry, in his homily at the royal wedding, told a church filled with high powered dignitaries of affluence and influence, "What would happen to governments, corporations, institutions, culture, society, households and hearts, if all were administrated by the ways of love." It has happened. There have been wondrous but rare anomalies in human history of persons rising to the places of power and influence who resist and transcend the corruption and abuses of power and who administrate their office, their privileges, their influence according to the ways and laws of love. The difference they make in our world is significant.

The way of love is the way that Jesus lived his life and exercised his authority and influence. When Jesus taught, I am the way, the truth, and the life, he was speaking of the divine path of love, of faith, of sacrifice. Love does not consume, exploit, conquer, or control, it does not live for self, Love gives life so that others can and will live. This is the way of God, the giver of life, of love, of grace, of peace, of beauty....

A community that practices and pursues the ways of love is a beautiful gift to the world... and that is exactly the gift Jesus intended the church to be. The church is uniquely empowered to be such a community of persons who are filled and directed with the spirit of love. The church is to be a sacrament: a physical manifestation of God's healing and life giving grace and peace and love. Our relationships are to be examples of patience, of kindness, of generosity, of forbearance. When persons visit such a community they feel a profound "otherworldly" sense of affection amidst the community that is not generally experienced in the world we live.

At our home, Annie insists upon an arbor that frames the entrance into the front garden. She said, "I like the feeling of passing through the arbor from one world of reality into the world of home. She is greeted by the smells, sights, bees and butterflies that fill the garden that is our front yard, and feels she is no longer in Kokomo, but the mystical realm of home. This is the vision intended for the community of the church. When one crosses the thresholds between one world and the beloved community, we are greeted with the seen and unseen ways and ethos of love, of peace, of grace, and of forgiveness. What a beautiful gift to give to the world. What an amazing privilege to be part of such a community of humanity and divinity, of flesh and of spirit, of beauty and grace, of belonging and of sharing of one's life for the help and sake of others. This is the church. This is who we are, this is who we can be, this is what we are intended.

Nadia Bolz Weber, a Lutheran Pastor and now internationally known for her brazen ways and philosophy of what it means to be the church. She began a church in Denver a few years ago. The church is called The House of Sinners and Saints. I have read that when she welcomes newcomers to the congregation she says, "...this church will disappoint you. Or I will fail to meet your expectations, or I'll say something stupid and hurt your feelings. It's not a matter of if it's when. Welcome to House for All Sinners and Saints. We will disappoint you.

She is right, this mystical, ancient, sacramental, transcendent community called to be a community of love, will inevitably disappoint you, and yet, through divine grace and love, the church is a place of profound peace, belonging, and wellness as we continue the ancient path to pursue the ways of love. As St. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, "Put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander and malice – be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Be imitators of God, as beloved children and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Being a church means being in community. It means to share your life with others. To treat them as you wish to be treated. To forgive them as you yourself will need to be forgiven. To encourage them as you will need encouragement. To pray for them as you yourself will need the prayers of your brothers and sisters. We experience that kind of community here at st. andrew, and we are called to renew our love for one another.

Amen