

Lutheran Episcopal Ministry@MIT
Wednesday May 9, 2012
Preacher: Kim Jackson

A couple weeks ago, as many of you know, it was CPW on campus. I had an interesting conversation with one of the prefrosh in McCormick. She asked me what major I was. I told her Course 16, Aerospace Engineering. Her eyes got really wide. Wow, she said! That's probably the most intimidating major at MIT!

And I said, well, maybe, but it's really depends on your perspective. For me, I said, I'm much more intimidated by something like biology or chemistry. It all depends on what you're interested in. Everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses, don't be intimidated by this place.

Don't be intimidated. Good advice.

See, the previous day, I'd met up with Janie, who asked me to preach. Well, actually, she said "you don't have to preach", but she wanted me to share something.

Don't be intimidated. So, here I am. And I'll try to keep it short. :)

Janie sent me this text, and I spent a long time trying to figure out what I wanted to say. And the excellent thing about the Bible is there's lots of truth in there, it speaks in different ways each time you read it, each time you experience it.

And what I realized, is this.

This passage, from 1 John, That's really all it comes down to. Everything I believe, the whole reason I'm Christian, comes down to this. God loves us, we should love others. This is the reason that I show up every week, and join you all in worship, in a meal, and in fellowship each week.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them

This is a familiar theme of course, it comes up before, earlier in the Bible, in an earlier story. Jesus is asked, Which of these commandments is the greatest?

Love God, love your neighbor. That is the greatest commandment.

Truly this is good news.

Back in the fall, I was approached by a guy in the student center. There I was minding my own business and eating lunch, and this guy sat down next to me and tried to explain to me why I should repent of my sins and believe in God. These sorts of conversations make me uncomfortable, you know? The whole idea of evangelism. Partly, I think, because I'm a very logical person. Yet, most of the logic typically used in this situations is akin to trickery. And this logical path was, well, I don't really know where we ended up, but I know a few words were redefined. I don't even know. And the funniest part of this conversation was that I tried to tell this guy that I am a Christian, and that he didn't need to convince me. But clearly, I wasn't the "right kind of Christian" (another phrase that bothers me)

And I just wanted to say, No, you don't get it! My God is a God of love. God loves me, despite

my faults, God loves you, whatever you may think, and I try to live up to that, and share that love with others. And of course I didn't actually say any of this because while most of this, to me, means living out my faith, and *showing* people through my actions. But, I do wish I had a better response to these situations, a better way to say this in words.

Love God, love your neighbor. That is the greatest commandment.

And the best part is, the best part of this statement, "love your neighbor", is there aren't any caveats. There aren't any "excepts".

I read a lot of things on the internet, and this particular one came up on my newsfeed. For those of you who can't see it, it says:

"This is a cat. He does not hate you because of your ethnicity, your sexuality, your gender, your appearance, or your religion. He hates you because he's a cat."

And I think this is an awesome statement. And I'm going to turn it around for a second.

God doesn't love you because of your ethnicity, your sexuality, your gender, your appearance, your good grades, your perfect attendance, your community service, whether you go to church on Sunday (or Wednesday). God loves you because God is God. And you are you. And you're human.

This can be a bit disconcerting.

I was listening to music earlier this week and came across a song lyric that puts this problem rather succinctly.

"We're hard to love". It's true, we are hard to love. We do dumb things, screw up, forget to call our parents, lose our tempers. We're impatient, annoying, frustrated, and illogical. We're only human, after all, with all the faults and failings that come with that.

When I was in high school, I went to the national presbyterian youth gathering, which was held every 3 years. It was called Triennium, since it was held every three years, and it was at Purdue University. And this was an amazing experience for me. I came from a pretty small church, so it was amazing to be there among all these other young people who, more or less, shared my beliefs, and were just excited to be there and meet people. And during one of our worship sessions, we had to greet each other, shaking hands and saying:

"God loves you and there's nothing you can do about it."

(You should try this to someone. It throws them off their guard.)

In fact, God loves us *in spite of* all of our faults and failings, in spite of our arrogance and pride and sinfulness.

So, this isn't just good news, this is AWESOME news.

Ok, back to the reading...

Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

I have a quote I'd like to share, from one of my favorite books. It's from a science fiction book, by Ursula K LeGuin, called "The Left Hand of Darkness":

"How does one hate a country, or love one? [...] I know people, I know towns, farms, hills and rivers and rocks, I know how the sun at sunset in autumn falls on the side of a certain plowland in the hills; but what is the sense of giving a boundary to all that, of giving it a name and ceasing to love where the name ceases to apply? What is love of one's country; is it hate of one's uncountryside? Then it's not a good thing. Is it simply self-love? That's a good thing, but one mustn't make a virtue of it, or a profession... Insofar as I love life, I love the hills of (my homeland) [...], but that sort of love does not have a boundary-line of hate.

The first time I went to Jerusalem, back in 2008, I had the privilege of meeting a few members of The Parents Circle. This is an organization made up of Israelis and Palestinians, men and women, who have lost children through the conflict. These are people who are neighbors in the most literal sense of the word, geographically, yet most of them would never even meet the other. And this group brings them together, in spite of the tragedies that they've faced, losing children through violence, through the army, through suicide bombings, and yet they're coming together to start to grow forgiveness, reconciliation, and love.

And if God can bring these people together, through all of their trials and hardships, and begin to bring peace and reconciliation to their hearts, there is truly nothing God can't do.

I'm going to close with a short prayer.

God, help us to love others, as you love us.

Amen.