

“Trading Love”

Romans 5:6-8

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June 10, 2007

Communion Devotion

The calendar had just turned to October and it was a beautiful fall day. It did not stay that way very long near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, though. A lone gunman by the name of Charles Carl Roberts IV stepped into a one room Amish school and opened fire. He killed five little girls and injured five more.

As you would expect, the attention of the entire country was focused upon this tragedy at the Nickel Mines School and these quiet, humble folk in Bart Township of Lancaster County. They taught us a lot that week about the radical nature of Christian love. On the evening of the shooting, family members of the slain children visited Carl Robert's parents and told them they had forgiven their son. They knew that the Roberts family was grieving, too, and offered to help them with their grief. People are still writing about the gracious response of the Amish to this disaster.

What are you going to do this week to help someone that has mistreated you? How are you going to be the presence of Christ in their life and confront them with the redeeming power of God's love? Today's text and this table demand that we answer these questions.

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us” Romans 5:6-8.

Let me tell you what I think we do very well in our society. **We are good at trading love.** We trade it with those that are like us and those that like us. We trade it with those that treat us with respect, dignity, courtesy and compassion. We trade it with family and friends when they are on their best behavior. There is nothing wrong with this, but if this is all we do, we are falling far short of what the gospel calls us to do.

The gospel challenges us to go to the next level in building relationships and community, the level of sacrificial love. It demands that we not merely trade love but give it away. It expects us to offer love to those that don't deserve it and those we would rather ignore or even hurt. It compels us to love people at their best and their worst. It requires that we love the lovely and the unlovely.

I know this is rare and certainly it is not easy. Even Paul admitted that someone may die for a good person or a noble cause, but it was highly unlikely that anyone would die for an enemy. Yet, the gospel gives us no choice. Jesus did it and so must we.

Why? We are his disciples and our mission is to make the world better by building bridges to people rather than walls between them and us. We are a peculiar people, the Apostle Peter wrote, because we are to be about building inclusive communities of understanding, equality, justice, mutual respect, grace and love. To do any less is to refuse to be a disciple of Christ, misunderstand the purpose of the gospel, ignore God's call upon our lives and fail to recognize the significance of Holy Communion.

Listen carefully to the words of Jesus uttered in the Sermon on the Mount. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous. If you love those that love you, what reward will you get? Are not even tax collectors doing this? And if you greet your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” Matthew 5:43-48.

How can we do this? I don't think we can, at least without a lot of help. I'm sure even Jesus struggled to love his enemies and spent many hours in prayer asking for God's help. "If it is possible," he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will be done but thine."

You have some time to think about this while the bread and cup are passed. Take advantage of it. Examine your relationships. Are you merely trading love or are you giving it away? Who is in your life right now that is most difficult for you to love? How are you going to be the presence of Christ in their life this week and confront them with the redeeming power of God's love? Make this a matter of prayer as we come to this holy table.