

LOVE IS NOT ONLY ABOUT YOU

John 12: 20-26; I Corinthians 13: 1-8

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An earthly kingdom will not last. At the time of Jesus, the people of Israel were suffering from the brutality of the Romans and they just wanted them gone. The Romans were an oppressive regime who controlled the Israelites through fear and coercion. Understandably, the people of Israel were longing for an earthly king to force the Romans out. The Romans had taken control of Israel in 63 BC.

About four generations before Jesus was born, a man by the name of Judah Maccabeus (aka – ‘the Hammer’) was a fairly righteous man who was angry that the Seleucids occupied the city of Jerusalem. He rallied support and created an army of Jewish men to fight against the Syrian occupiers. In 163 BCE he rode into Jerusalem on a massive stallion and the people waved branches and shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Judah Maccabeus (Maccabee) was a hero to them, and they thought he was the Messiah! When Judas Maccabeus and his army entered the city they cleaned out the temple; they started to burn incense; offered sacrifices, and lit a Menorah (a candelabrum used in Jewish worship) that burned for 8 days. This historic event was the start of the Jewish 8 day holiday called Hanukkah – to celebrate Judas Maccabeus’ accomplishments. Not long after, Judas was killed in battle. He intended to set up an earthly kingdom, but in the end he died. His earthly kingdom did not last very long.

A spiritual kingdom is built on love not military might! In contrast to Judas Maccabeus, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey – which (unlike a horse) is not an animal of war. When questioned by Pilate, Jesus said (as recorded in John 18: 36, 37), *“My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”* Pilate asked him, *“So you are a king?”* Jesus answered, *“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”*

Jesus is the truth (Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” John 14:6). The truth would be defined as love because Jesus is love. The nature of God is love (I John 4: 8) as revealed through Jesus’ death and resurrection! Jesus’ Kingdom is built on a love – a love that crosses all earthly boundaries. His love is with us wherever we are. It is a love that stays with us past this earthly life and into eternity. His love is the kind of love (agape) that sacrifices oneself for the needs of others. Jesus’ kingdom is all about love and forgiveness, a kingdom that lasts forever! In following Christ, we are to work for this Spiritual Kingdom, not the kingdoms of the world. It is important to learn more about this love – a love that does not insist on its own way (I Corinthians 13:5).

Love does not insist on its own way. Jesus was not egocentric. He was about putting himself aside for the sake of others. Love does not pursue its own interests. Love is not selfish. You have heard it said that there are two kinds of people: Those who are always concerned about their rights, and those who are focused on their responsibilities. We live in a time of selfishness, and it is obstructing us from moving forward. Almost everyone is guarding their own rights. The attitude goes something like this: “Let others find their way, I am looking after number one. You can’t do anything about it. It’s a dog eat dog world.” This ‘all about me’ attitude can be so pervasive, that people will lose their relationships and their marriages insisting that they are right in an argument. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection is in stark contrast to this attitude. Jesus’ kingdom is of thinking of others and looking for ways to serve. Following Jesus’ example can be so difficult

in this society of consumerism which continually reinforces the attitude of personal dissatisfaction and greed. Without thinking, we can take this attitude into our relationships and diminish them. The Word of God inspires us to practice downward mobility of self (the opposite of 'it's all about me') to better position ourselves for love.

Downward mobility of self: Our reading today from John 12: 20-26 has Jesus making it clear that in order to grow and move forward, one is to be like a seed that goes in the ground and dies, before new life and growth can happen. When we diminish the 'all about me' or the 'I'll do it my way' attitude, the joy and health in life multiplies to ourselves and others because we get ourselves out of the way to see Jesus more clearly. Jesus said in John 12: 25, *"Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* Are you going after the Kingdom of this world, or Christ's spiritual kingdom?

In our western society, we are conditioned from an early age for upward mobility. We start as teenagers with lower paying jobs, and we are encouraged to work hard and make our way 'up the ladder'. When we choose lower paying professions, the choice is not always met with approval from our family and peers. Upward mobility is a good thing in order to provide the needs for your family. However, in our consumer oriented society, we are encouraged to get stuff to make our lives easier and better. We start to develop a taste for higher level items which require us to move to a higher income lifestyle. When the upward mobility is not in our reach, we can become dissatisfied. Regardless of where you are on the income scale in Canada, compared to most of the world, our disposable income is among the top 10% in the world and we have more freedom to spend money on what we choose.

Now, in terms of practicing downward mobility think about something you own that someone can really use. You have the right to keep it, but someone else needs it more than you. You may have a good car that you could sell to someone in need for a very low price, or decide to give it to them. You have a skill that could help others get out of a rut. You give up your Wednesday evenings for example, to share your expertise with someone so they can move forward.

Intentional movement towards downward mobility means you want to make it less about you. It is not about you, and when you share your abundance with others, you are practicing love – you are not insisting on your own way! Hallelujah! Once we get ourselves out of the way (so to speak) and share with others, we will see the Spiritual Kingdom of Jesus with better clarity.

Seeing Jesus: When we see people showing love and not insisting on their own way (even if they have the right to do so) we see Jesus. Here is an example: Theologian William Barclay tells this story: *Edwin Stanton was a fierce opponent of Abraham Lincoln in the early days of their political careers. Stanton even poked fun at the awkward-looking Lincoln and called him a clown, gorilla, etc. When Lincoln became president, however, he appointed Stanton to the position of what we call today, 'Secretary of Defense' because he felt he was the best man for the job. Later, when President Lincoln was lying dead as a result of the assassin's bullet, Stanton who was at Lincoln's bedside said, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen."*

I Corinthians 13: 5, *"Love does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful."* Love is the strongest force in the world!

Let's live by these words, so we and others can see Jesus and the hope and healing Jesus' way brings to our lives and to the world. Amen.