UNIV. HTS. PRESBY. CHURCH---WORSHIP—MAY 19, 2019

SERMON TOPIC: “CHOOSING TO LOVE”

I offer the following verses of Scripture for meditation, reflection, application, transformation, and practice. Let us take these to heart and ask the Holy Spirit to do His work in us and through us:

***--“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you so you should love one another.” (***John 13: 34)

***--“…A lawyer asked Jesus a question to test Him: --Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus answered: “You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and First Commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*** (Matthew 22: 34-36)

--“…**And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.” (1st Corinth. 13: 13)**

**“…Pursue love and strive for spiritual gifts…” (1st Corinth. 14: 1a)**

“**Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the Law. The Commandments: --You shall not covet, --you shall not commit adultery, --you shall not steal, and the other commandments are summed up in this word: LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfillment of the Law. (Romans 13: 8-10)**

**“…Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit serving the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer, extend hospitality to strangers, and contribute to the needs of the saints.”** **(Romans 12: 9-13)**

**“…Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship?, or distress? Or persecution? Or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? … It is written, “For your sakes we are being killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered. No—in all things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8: 35-38)**

Our subject for today: CHOOSING TO LOVE” is somewhat of a misnomer. This is because it is more than just a CHOICE. It is a COMMAND. It is the NEW COMMANDMENT that overpowers, outshines, displaces, and fulfills all the other TEN COMMANDMENTS AND OVER SIX HUNDRED PRECEPTS AND ORDINANCES IN THE OLD TESTAMANT. Yet so often we miss this simple commandment. We ignore it, disobey it, misunderstand it, forget it, and even rebel against it. At the same time, although God gives us His Commandment, God does not force us to obey them. WE ARE GIVEN A CHOICE. Therefore, it seems to me, that we must make a CONSCIOUS CHOICE TO **DO** THE LOVE THING. When our flesh and our emotions are tempted to react in kind to evil done to us, God’s way is for us to RESIST that temptation, cool off, respond in LOVE and overcome evil with good. This may require a conscious effort and a pre-planned intention, for it goes against the grain of the natural law of the flesh. If we are serious, we will need to make it our goal and let it become our culture and modus operandum. QUITE OFTEN we might find that WE MUST LEAN ON THE LOVE OF JESUS TO HELP US BECOME PROFICIENT AT THIS until it becomes our automatic and authentic response and resolve. For some of us it is easier to learn and to practice LOVE than for others depending on our environment and experiences in life. However, we can be sure that **with God’s help it can be achieved.** WHY? Because if God commands it and requires it, then God is able to TRANSFORM our ways through the Word and work of the Holy Spirit. Scripture tells us that **by the Holy Spirit, the love of God is spread abroad in our hearts.** The LORD has also promised to abide in us and to replace our stony hearts with hearts of flesh in which God will inscribe the NEW LAW OF LOVE. **(Let it be so now we pray!)** The Law written on stone tablets is in the stony heart of people and demands an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It requires people to be stoned for petty infarctions. The Law written on stone in the stony heart is the LAW OF PUNISHMENT, DEATH, AND DESTRUCTION. But Jesus came with a NEW COMMANDMENT OR LAW. IT IS THE LAW OF LIFE, MERCY, FORGIVENESS, AND GRACE THROUGH FAITH. IT IS THE LAW OF LOVE. He is the One who told the Pharisees who brought the woman -caught red-handed in the act of adultery all by herself ???!!!: “Let the one who is without sin, cast the first stone.” In shame they all slumped away speechless. So often we tend to be quick to judge the error or sin of others without seeing our own. We are too often quick to condemn without first judging ourselves. YET WE WANT GOD IN HIS STEADFAST LOVE AND MERCY TO FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS. But His rule is that we must also forgive others if we will have His mercy and forgiveness flowing to us. The LORD instructs us to CHOOSE LOVE OVER HATE. But sometimes it is easier said than done. We need the help of the God of love to teach us how.

As I looked at the text from John 13: 31-35 and heard the Commandment of LOVE Jesus had just instituted, I decided to go back a few verses to Vv. 27-30. For I wanted to see what was going on that Jesus would declare this New Commandment at this time and place. To my surprise, it was just after He had dipped the bread in the dish and gave it to JUDAS ISCARIOT. He then said to Judas: (friend) “Do quickly what you are going to do.” (referring to his betrayal by Judas) I asked myself: --WHY WOULD JESUS PLACE THE NEW COMMANDMENT OF LOVE RIGHT NEXT TO THE PLACE AND CIRCUMSTANCE WHERE HE KNEW JUDAS WAS ABOUT TO BETRAY HIM? I believe that even in this act of betrayal, when Judas was most despicable, and hateful, JESUS CHOSE TO LOVE, AND WANTED US TO LEARN THAT HATE IS NEVER A RIGHT OPTION THAT CAN LEAD TO A RIGHT OUTCOME. Although Judas was predestined to carry out this heinous act, Jesus, I believe, intended us to see that despite it all, He Christ, had no HATE IN HIMSELF FOR JUDAS OR FOR ANYONE ELSE; f**or He Jesus, was the embodiment of God’s Love and nothing even Judas could do would be able to change that resolve and that truth.** **FOR GOD IS LOVE, according to 1st John 4: 7-21. God abides in those who confess Christ Jesus as the Son of God and they abide in God. …There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. We love because God first loved us and sacrificed His only Begotten Son for the redemption of our souls and the forgiveness of our sins unto Salvation and eternal Life.** Maybe some of us are not able to comprehend what all this means, and we may not until we see His Glory at the final day of Judgement. However, in the meantime, let us trust, obey, and believe by faith that it is something FAR GREATER AND BETTER THAN WE COULD EVER IMAGINE! ALL THE EVIL AND WRONG WE EXPERIENCE HERE IN THIS WORLD WILL TURN OUT FOR OUR GOOD IN THE END IF WE REMAIN FAITHFUL.

**We are not just choosing to love. We are commanded to love God, self, and neighbor.** Some of us have heard of the three theological terms for LOVE: Phileo, Eros, and Agape Love. Brotherly, Marital, and Unconditional / pure love of God. All are necessary in living life fully. But the greatest of these is THE AGAPE LOVE OF GOD WHICH IS UNCONDITIONAL. **At the same time, I would like to remind us that those who God loves, God corrects or chastens.** So, **let us not think that the God of Love is going to let us do as we please, how we please, and any way we please.**  It is because God loves us that God wants to keep us close to Himself. It is because God has paid a price for our Salvation that God wants to protect that invaluable gift and will go to great lengths to preserve us and His gift to us. GOD’S LOVE FOR US IS PERSISTENT, PASSIONATE, PROTECTIVE, AND SACRIFICIAL. IN TURN, GOD REQUIRES OUR LOVE AND DEVOTION, OUR WORSHIP, OUR DEDICATION IN SERVICE, OUR FAITHFULNESS TO HIM AND HIM ALONE. **Love is more than just an emotion.** IT IS A CHOICE AND A CONSCIOUS INTENTION. Jesus asked Peter: “DO YOU LOVE ME?” THREE TIMES AND THEN ASSIGNED HIM THE AWESOME TASK OF FEEDING HIS LAMBS AND SHEEP. **So if you are human like the rest of us,** who sometimes struggle with loving the unlovable, those who hurt you, despitefully use you, say all manner of evil against you falsely for Christ sake, **I pray** that the Almighty God who gave this Commandment through Christ Jesus to us, will enable us to overcome evil with good.  **I pray that** the LORD, Jehovah God in Christ Jesus will enable us to rejoice and to be exceedingly glad, for when we suffer for His sake, we are assured that our reward is great in heaven. (And I believe that starts here and now as well.) **I pray that** the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts and continually increase and expand in our lives, relationships, families, and churches so we will live in harmony, in peace, without hate, and in unity -which is the atmosphere from which all blessings flow. **I beseech the God of Love** to fill us with His unconditional Agape love, brotherly Phileo love, and Marital love for those who are married or are seeking to be married. I ENCOURAGE US TO CHOOSE ALL THE LOVE GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR US TO BE HAPPY, JOYFUL, AND WELL; FOR ALL LOVE THAT IS GOOD IS FROM GOD, IS OF GOD, AND IS GOD-- FOR GOD IS LOVE. Beloved we were created by a God of Love who is Love itself. We were created for love, to be loved, and to love others. Grant us, O God of love, we pray; the quality, the character, and the grace to reflect Your Love in the world.

Lord Jesus, even when you knew what Judas was about to do, you called him “friend.” TRULY, ONLY GOD COULD DO SUCH A THING. YOU ARE GOD IN FLESH. YOU ARE GOD’S LOVE IN FLESH EXPRESSED IN REALITY FOR SINFUL HUMANITY TO RECEIVE AND TO SHARE BY YOUR GRACE. –LORD JESUS, WE ASK YOU TO FILL US WITH YOUR LOVE TODAY AND EVERY DAY UNTIL WE ARE UNABLE TO HATE EXCEPT TO HATE SIN AND TO HATE --HATE ITSELF. Jehovah God, in Your divine mercy, may You cause this to be so for us now we ask. Let the change be evident in all of us we pray. MAKE LOVE AS IMPORTANT TO US AS IT IS TO YOU SO WE WILL LIVE IN OBEDIENCE TO YOUR NEW LAW WE BESEECH YOU!

IF WE BELIEVE THIS IS NECESSARY; IF WE BELIEVE IT IS GOOD; IF WE DESIRE THIS LAW TO COME ALIVE IN US, THEN LET US SAY: “TO GOD BE ALL THE GLORY, HONOR AND PRAISE FOR WE ARE RIGHT NOW BEING CHANGED FROM HEARTS OF STONE WRITTEN ON TABLETS OF STONE TO HEARTS OF FLESH INSCRIBED WITHIN -THE LAW OF LOVE. LET IT BE SO NOW, O GOD OF LOVE. LET IT BE SO EVERYWHERE IN THIS NATION AND IN THIS WORLD, WE PRAY. CHANGE OUR HEARTS O GOD, MAKE THEM EVER TRUE; CHANGE OUR HEARTS O GOD, LET THEM BE LIKE YOU. CHANGE OUR WORLD, OUR NATION, OUR SCHOOLS, OUR FAMILIES, … O GOD. LET YOUR LOVE FLOW LIKE A RIVER AND FLOOD THE NATIONS WITH GRACE AND GLORY. WE PRAY THIS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS. WE AGREE AND CONSIDER THIS DONE, SEALED, MANIFESTED, APPLIED, APPROPRIATED, ACTIVATED, AND PROTECTED, ESTABLISHED AND ACCOMPLISHED, ROOTED, GROUNDED, AND STRENGTHENED IN EVERY AREA OF EVERY LIFE HERE PRESENT, EVERY HEART, AND EVERY SOUL. WE RECEIVE THESE BLESSINGS BY FAITH AND WITH THANKSGIVING.

Amen.