

“What does Everlasting Love look like?”

Sermon by Dan Harrison, pastor of Church of the Covenant, 5/16/21

John 17:20-23

In the scripture that we just read, we see Jesus praying a special prayer where he looks ahead to us, the spiritual descendants of the people that believe his “message.” Some people interpret this as Jesus praying for future Christians and almost take this prayer personally as a sacred affirmation their unique faith. I believe it is much broader than that. Jesus seems to point to a special love that comes with harmony, a special love that comes with unity. He said, “I in them and you in me so that they can come to complete unity.”

Unity is the key. But unity does not mean we agree on everything. No. It refers to something beneath our opinions. Above our politics. Deeper inside than even our experiences. It is a connection with one another. Later in this prayer Jesus says to God, “...you loved before the creation of the world.” This refers to something outside of our timeline. It seems to indicate that God loves Jesus, and in the spirit, God loves us outside of time altogether. God loved us before creation and God will love us through creation and God will love us after creation. To be even more specific: God loves with an everlasting love. If God loves with an everlasting love, then there is nothing you or I or anyone or anything can do to somehow remove that love. It is fixed in place forever. This is Love Everlasting. And this love is not exclusive to God. Jesus talked about this level of love to be circular. However, many religious folks today will want to immediately talk about as God loves us we must love God, and that the real challenge is in how we return God’s love back to the Creator. I don’t think that is the problem, well not in the sense that many propose. I think the problem is how we love one another.

Do we love one another with an Everlasting Love? This means with a love that cannot be broken, ever. This means that we love people despite our disagreements. We love people even if they do not love us back. We love people inside their deepest pain. We do not run away but we stay in there. We do not close our eyes to that pain. We keep our eyes open, even if it hurts us to see it. Why? Because we are to love with an everlasting love, beyond pain. Jesus demonstrated this over and over. This is the only way to bring harmony to us all. We must take the first step. To love others by truly seeing them. And then loving them into unity by loving unconditionally. It is to love despite pain.

This will not be easy, to take the hands of our enemies but we must do it—for you have no enemies anymore. This is the message: Love. And love in action begins with our love having no boundaries. Let us love others into unity with one another. Let us love the suffering and oppressor alike. This will not be easy and we must do it carefully, but love can conquer hate. Let us find a way to show that it works. And may God bring peace to the Holy Land; this bloodshed is the opposite of the message of love. This is not unity. Unity begins with our love for one another.

Shalom