

“Pearls before Swine”

Song of Songs 3:1-5

Matthew 7:6

This has been a very hard week – with the hurricane moving through the Gulf and beyond, the shooting of Jacob Black, the wildfires in California, protests wracked with violence, vigilantes feeling empowered to kill. This has been a very hard week and that’s on top of our ongoing struggle with the coronavirus. Any one of these things should call us to collective mourning, but everything happening all at once for so long seems to lead many of us to shut out the world. We’re narrowing our focus on what we prefer, and then choosing to see our narrow focus as holding all of reality.

So often, we’re stopping our hearts from caring in order to make it through this time. I don’t think we’re necessarily doing it on purpose, but this approach to our current crises has its own dangerous, lingering impact. I would hope that when we first heard about Jacob Black being shot by police that our first response would be shock, sadness, caution, concern for him and his family. I would hope that we would withhold judgment of the specific facts of the situation until all the information comes in. But, instead, we move to our separate camps whose lines and arguments are already drawn out – blame the police or blame the victim, shout down any piece of information that does not conform to our beliefs, decry the other side for destroying America. Though many talking heads and armchair pundits can pretend to be so expert, how many remember that we are speaking of real lives, real people, real grief? How many stop to genuinely express sorrow and sympathy for other peoples’ pain and uncertainty, fear and anger that their personal tragedy has become a national spectacle?

The same pattern continued in Kenosha when the young vigilante shot three protestors and killed two of them. The battle lines of America have been drawn and no one dare show sympathy if it is out of bounds with what your “side” permits – homicide or self-defense.

There’s so much controversy about lives mattering these days – so much you can tell a lot about a person by who or what group of people come at the beginning of “_____ lives matter.” We have to remember that our faith is more than political slogans. Our faith is more than our divisiveness, hatred, distrust and increasing disgust towards one another. Our faith was born from a love that gave birth to all creation. We believe that God so loved the world...every person in the world...“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life.”

We are made in love, made for love, sent out in love – so why are we so easily convinced to sacrifice our loving hearts on the altars of hatred, pride, anger, and apathy? So often we sing, “they’ll know we are Christians by our love,” echoing Jesus’s command to the disciples when he washed their feet at the Last Supper. It is hard to believe that we have come to this point – not caring whether someone lives or dies is not Christian love.

Our Gospel reading this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew – it’s part of the Sermon on the Mount, which Jesus began with the beatitudes. This verse seems to come out of nowhere with Jesus first commanding us not to judge others and later charging us to “ask, and it will be given you.” But in between that, Jesus commands us to guard what is holy – to remember the incalculable value of the truly precious things that God has given us. It is vital for us to understand what holiness is in order to keep what is holy.

First, we remember that God is entirely different from us – greater than all humanity, exalted, all merciful, full of grace, unfathomable to human minds. Just as God is different or set

apart, so are things that are connected to God. So, the Temple was holy, our church is holy, your phone and laptop are now holy because they are part of your worship and striving after God. When we dedicate ourselves to serving Christ and following the leading of the Spirit, we are committing ourselves to living holy lives. The more we learn to unlearn the ways of sin and evil, the more we are transformed into the holiness of God in Christ. God is love and so when we love we are being as different as we can be, as holy as we can be.

People often wonder why the Song of Songs is in the Bible. After all, it's love poetry – deeply personal, often quite private. Yet, we recognize the passion, don't we? We know what it's like to care about someone else so deeply. It's not a generic, abstract love – it's a love that seeks that particular one. Even though this passage is certainly a love poem, I think it follows for other loves we might have in our life – of parents, of children, of spouses, of friends. When we are worried about those we love, when we seek their well-being, nothing will stop us until we are sure that they are safe – until we feel their familiar softness in our arms. We will search for them, call for them, roam the streets, bother passersby, and then when we find our love – oh, the indescribable joy! This is love – the love God has for us, that Christ showed in dying and rising, and that we echo in each and every holy action.

The lure of sin and evil is strong today – in those who would tarnish our hearts and give us reasons not to care about human life. This is an incredibly hard time to be a Christian, to have a loving heart, to continue to care about all the misery and hardship around us. But if we give up our loving hearts, we are giving what is holy to dogs. We are throwing our pearls before swine and it will not be long before we find our hearts trampled and our lives hollowing out from deep within. In Christ, we must claim love. In Christ, we must pray for our neighbors, remembering that God loves every individual hair on every one of us. So, who are we to put down God's

creation? In Christ, we must work and pray for peace, trusting that the God of love always brings the triumph of love. Amen.