

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

January 31, 2010

This sermon was preached by Pastor Jim Page at Trinity Lutheran Church

## “The Upside Down Nature of Love”

The 2003 movie ‘Love Actually’ follows the lives of eight very different couples as they live through various elements of love in their relationships.

It is a movie with humor and powerful, heart-convicting insight.

[movie clip shows an arrival gate at the Heathrow Airport in London]

Returning home from a lengthy journey is marked by the long awaited hug from family and friends.

Time apart from loved ones brings with it a realization of how important such people are in our lives.

Our scripture readings today give us a glimpse of how Jesus’ love in his hometown turned the world upside down for the good of all still today.

Robert Frost once said that “Home is the place where, when you get there they have to let you in.”

From the day we were born, home is where our values and beliefs are shaped, memories are made, and our outlook of the world is formed.

If you are from Bloomington, MN. folks in your hometown have been upset over a recent football game. Yet, if you are from Ipsala, Michigan, your team continues in the tradition of losing records with the Detroit Lions.

Beyond lackluster sporting events, home is where we like to be when tragedy occurs when the world is turned upside down, so to speak.

The earthquake in Haiti literally turned the world upside down for those who live there. A magnitude 7.2 earthquake doesn’t respect anyone. Rich and poor together are homeless, helpless and hurting. All things considered, everything is different for that small nation as well as for the world.

When tragedy occurs, there comes the human **obligation** to support those who, according to Psalm 23, “are walking in the valley of the shadow of death.”

In ancient culture, there was an obligation to take care of your own. Jesus was born in Bethlehem but raised in a town called Nazareth. Nazareth wasn't a town with a great reputation. Sinful influences were rampant and God's presence was virtually non-existent. The Israelites longed for deliverance as they fervently prayed, and followed God's commands, in hopes that the Messiah would soon save them.

Our gospel reading today tells of Jesus' return home after spending 40 days alone in the wilderness, fasting, and overcoming three temptations of the devil. He opened up the scroll of Isaiah relative to prophetic words describing the Messiah, Jesus says that he was the fulfillment of such words, and his hometown folks were pleasantly surprised.

Some even said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" Joseph, the peasant carpenter, isn't this his son? He was one of their own, they were thrilled perhaps saying, "Preach it Jesus. Give us the good news. Do here the same good things here as you did in Capernaum!"

They knew what the scriptures foretold about God's promised deliverance. Yet, Jesus brought a message people didn't want to hear.

Jesus interprets scripture through himself as the Son of God in their midst. Jesus boldly states that God's deliverance will be for everyone, not just for a select few as scripture had stated.

In so doing, he mixes status and social standing to the anger of those comfortable with how things had been.

I mean, this isn't anger where they simply didn't want to talk to him. No, folks, they wanted to kill him.

For us today, these words bring to our eyes the nature of the God who is vs. the God that we want God to be. The basic human condition prefers a God that fits our mold, the God that makes us comfortable, the God that doesn't demand too much of us.

And the God who confronts us with the reality of who we are, requires certain things from us such as forgiveness and love for all...all in a message we can easily reject.

Rejection hurts be it at school among peers, receiving rejection letters for employment. Rejection hurts since it connotes that you're not needed. When have we rejected God?

Edwin Friedman's recent book, "A Failure of Nerve" describes a unique concept that he calls a well-differentiated leader.

He observed various families over 25 years. Families in crisis relative to a sudden death of a loved one, children who act out, severe illness, polarized marital conflict, financial problems and other external impacts.

The single variable that most distinguished between that families that survived and flourished was the presence of a well-differentiated leader.

A well-differentiated leader has clarity about his/her goals and is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about. They manage their reactivity to the automatic reactivity of others.

When the notion of reactivity between others arise there comes the element of relationships, interactions between people. In such a circumstance, scripture is used most often relative to weddings where a relationship is the focus of attention. It is 1 Corinthians 13 where the apostle Paul writes about love. He wrote this letter to the church in Corinth that was divided on many issues and anger and ill-will was rampant.

His words, which focused on relating to others, turned the world upside down as it described the love given by God.

The first descriptor element of that love is patience.  
"Love is patient, love is kind..."

He begins with patience which is unique. Patience allows you to respond in a positive way to a negative situation. There is an internal calm amid an external storm. Responding impatiently out of anger only spawns greater pain and problems.

When your spouse makes you upset, the kids create an ever greater mess on an already hectic day, the kid at school says something rude and insulting...do you retaliate or stay under control?

Consider the Old Testament book of Proverbs 15:18, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute."

It is often in a dog-eat-dog world where more is better and expectations need to be met where patience is hard to find let alone experience. It is patience, grounded in love, that can positively turn the world upside down

When Christ was hanging upright on the cross for our sins...a death he patiently accepted...that he turned the world upside down.

Turned the world upside down where the weak would have power, those broken would be whole, where there was death-eternal life would be present.

I share with you a testament of one man's love for God from the earthquake in Haiti.

Renee Larson, along with her husband Ben, and Ben's cousin Jonathan Larson went to Haiti to teach Lutheran theology to members and pastors of the new Lutheran Church during the seminary's J-term. Three weeks in January. Ben and Jonathan were working towards becoming pastors and Renee was working on her master's thesis about the emerging Lutheran church in Haiti.

They were on the third floor of the three story building of the St. Joseph Home for Boys when the earthquake struck. Renee and Jonathan were together while she saw Ben hugging a pillar in the middle of the floor. She said, "I turned and saw him, and I saw concrete fall on him. I called for him and started running toward him."

At that moment, the two floors collapsed beneath them. Jon and Renee were trapped for a short time but managed to squeeze out onto the roof to try and find Ben. The building shifted with subtle aftershocks.

They returned to where they crawled out and called out for Ben.

Renee heard Ben's voice and he was singing...not unusual since Ben loved music.

She said, "I told him I loved him, that Jon and I were okay, and to keep singing."

They heard him faintly sing the words, "God's peace to us we pray."

Then the singing stopped.

Renee said that, "All he wanted was to be a pastor in this church."

It is the love shown by others that proves to be inspiring for us to follow, reminded of the goodness that is produced.

You can be confident that God shows you the reality of who you are as a forgiven and loved child of God.

Forgiven and loved shown by the loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

It is that love that gives confidence and hope as we embellish that love each day.

It is that promise that gives us the hope that someday, you will experience the joy found at the arrival gate of his heavenly home.

A time where loved ones will embrace and joyful laughter will resound.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.