

“LOVE ANYWAY”
“When Blessings Become Curses”

February is the month for “love” not only in the hallmark retail world, but also within the UMC resist harm movement. After the focus on sacred resistance, the focus on love might seem a bit sentimental or light weight. It is neither. Love truly is the most powerful force in heaven and on earth. We underestimate what can happen when we love God and love each other. Love changes lives, changes hearts, transforms individuals and communities. To live out the greatest commandment to Love is one of the hardest things we ever attempt in our lives. Jesus sharing of the beatitudes show exactly how difficult the law of Love and the behavior of faith can be. During this month, we will focus on those Beatitudes and on Paul’s words to the church at Corinth. These verses will challenge us to deepen our love and to make that love real in our world today. Each week we will be challenged to love anyway in the midst of challenges and busyness.

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“When Blessings Become Curses”**

Prayer of the Week: *Loving God, we come this day seeking to abide in your presence. Open our minds to your spirit of wisdom, that we may know how to live as your people. Open our hearts to your spirit of truth, that we may love all your people with a love that speaks of justice, kindness, and radical grace. May this day be authentic and pleasing to you. Amen.*

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

STUDY GUIDE

Monday, February 3, 2020 Matthew 5: 1-5

These verses begin Jesus’ “sermon on the mount” which goes from Matthew 5 through Matthew 7. This series of saying paints a picture of what Jesus’ followers look like and how they behave. Jesus begins this sermon with who is “blessed” or “happy” depending on your biblical translation. Now the terminology is not so much about being happy or blessed in the way we usually think about it in our culture. Instead Jesus is speaking of being “content” or “secure” or “complete.” In our world focused on being a winner or being successful, using words like merciful, or mourning or humble or peacemakers are not used. Humility, humbleness, merciful are seen as traits of losers, not winners. Using Paul’s words, it is exactly this kind of foolishness that creates a kingdom of love, of justice, of peace, of grace and of God. To love in the face of grief, in humbleness and humility is a mark of being a follower of Jesus. *Today, reach out to someone grieving, maybe someone who has lost a loved one six months ago or longer, maybe someone who has been laid off or has a difficult broken relationship. Call them, take them out for a cup of coffee or write a nice note to tell them you are thinking of them.*

Tuesday, February 4, 2020 Matthew 5: 6-9

This group of people named might be a bit easier to embrace as “blessed or happy.” Those who hunger or thirst for righteousness, those who are merciful and those who make peace and are pure of heart, these are the attributes we expect of the follower of Jesus. These are the values we think of when we think of “spiritual” or “religious.” And yet, these are not attributes that are valued in our culture and society. Who cares about the righteous? We overlook so many lies and celebrate hatefulness and bullying. You can think of many examples of how those who work for peace are ignored or shouted down. Even Christians often turn their backs on those who exhibit Christian behavior. Jesus never said these behaviors were easy, he only said they were blessed and they would make us happy and peaceful. These listed values are all about God and not about human beings in the end. *How do you live out your role as a peacemaker, as one who seeks to be pure of heart and merciful? Today, do one thing as a follower of Christ: make a call to one of your representatives on an issue important to you, make a donation to a charity that offers mercy and peace in the world. Then say a prayer, that you might be one of those who are actively working for peace, mercy and righteousness in our world.*

Wednesday, February 5, 2020 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

Verse eighteen is the basis for the rest of this chapter that Paul is writing to the church at Corinth. Paul, in his earlier life, was never considered a fool. He was well respected for his scholarship and learning as a Rabbi and as a Pharisee. He set out against the followers of Jesus because he considered them a threat to his own faith. Paul was no one's fool until he became a fool for Christ. When Paul converted, all his friends and family must have considered him crazy. The cross really is foolishness, an instrument of death and a symbol of the empire. As a religious debater, Paul understood that for many, whether religious or secular the cross is crazy, unacceptable. And yet, it is the symbol of God's love and grace in the world. It is foolish because it is how God showed the world the Divine Love shining forth from a cross. God's yes to us is far more powerful than our no. This symbol of loss and defeat in the eyes of the successful and of the world is an invitation that no matter what comes our way, we are called to Love Anyway. *Today, be foolish and offer yourself to God to be used to share love and grace.*

Thursday, February 6, 2020 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31

This past Sunday was the Super Bowl. Many in Kansas were excited because the Chiefs played for the first time in fifty years. As I write this, I do not know who wins and who loses. Getting to the Super Bowl is about the best of the best, the cream of the crop and the teams that somehow managed to learn to play together and work together until the final payoff. In God's kingdom, Paul points out, it isn't the most talented, the richest or the smartest that necessarily make the “team,” it is those who believe and are willing to follow Jesus no matter how foolish it may seem. Loving and offering grace are the skills for those who long to live a deeper life of faith. *Today, be intentional in offering love and grace. Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there a relationship that needs some healing? Be the agent of love today.*

Friday, February 7, 2020 Matthew 5: 10-12

Basically in these verses Jesus says that when a person is dumped that makes them complete, content and happy. Who wants to be persecuted or reviled or have someone talk bad about them? Jesus says, don't worry about it, a person will be blessed and content and secure. The kingdom of God is not in what one owns, what awards one has received or how much one might have. The kingdom of God is about integrity of spirit, about faith in Christ and a way of living that makes the world a better place and does not make it worse for others. These are difficult concepts in a world that is about winning, about fame and about beating out others for promotions, wealth and position. Being a fool for Christ's sake means trusting that God's “team or kingdom” makes room for the meek, the merciful, the weak, the grief-stricken, the bullied and all those who live life on the edge. It is the foolishness of “Love Anyway” that points to God's work in the world. *What will you do today to love anyway? How will you offer a blessing and grace to those who need it most?*