

Pastor's Message—May 2018

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)

Spring is in the air, or is it? Throughout this year our weather patterns have been unusual for our area. One day the temps are in the upper 80's and the next evening it is snowing. One day the flowers and trees are blooming and the next day the blossoms are falling to the ground because of high winds and cold temps. My opinion is that maybe, just maybe God is showing us who is in charge. Just as we parents and grandparents, on occasion, need to remind the children in our lives who the rule setters are in our family, God needs to remind us that as Christians He sets our rules. When we begin to falter or not listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit, God has a tendency to do something that makes us back up and regroup so that we can begin again. The grace is that we can begin again.



Recently I have been participating in the confirmation classes with the other five pastors and youth leaders of the Martinsburg United Methodist Churches. We have nine students who are keeping us on our toes. One of the classes was centered around grace. We stressed these important aspects of grace. God shows and gives us grace every day. We don't or can't do anything to deserve His love and grace; it is just there. Our response to God's grace and love so freely given is to just accept it on God's terms which are laid out for us in the scriptures. The most important of those terms are to love God and have no other gods before Him and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Sometimes, we get confused about loving others. The thief on the cross who had not known anything about Jesus until that day he hung on a cross beside Jesus was a child of God, and because he responded to the love shown him by Jesus he was promised a place in eternity with Jesus. It is true that unlike those of us living today, the thief didn't have an opportunity to return to his life on earth. He didn't have to choose how he was going to live out the rest of his life. We have to choose how we are going to respond to God's love as long as we are living on this side of heaven. Are we going to accept it and do everything in our power (realizing that we are not perfect) to live by God's rules or are we going to reject it and let others persuade us to be disobedient to God?

Living by God's rules doesn't mean that we are hateful or hurtful to others. We are always to show love and grace, however we cannot wear blinders and pretend that sin doesn't exist. We are called to show love to all, but not accept their or our own sinful ways. For example: My brother (with whom I cleared this sharing) abused alcohol. He drank exceedingly for a long time. His drinking caused our parents and others great pain. He wrecked multiple cars, was physically injured and hospitalized several times, all due to his abuse of alcohol. During this time, I never ever stopped loving him but I hated the sin of alcohol abuse, among others he committed while being intoxicated. I am very happy to share that in February 2018 he celebrated 27 years of sobriety.

Jesus saw the sins of those to whom he ministered. In the midst of their sinful natures he loved them, healed them of their infirmities and he would tell them to go and sin no more. He loved them but disliked their sin. God can and does have the ability to switch up our weather patterns. As Christians, who follow the word of God, we do not have the authority to change God's scriptures. Our world, our states, our communities, our churches are living in particularly troubled times. I pray that we all try to remember that it is the sins we hate and not the sinner. We cannot be a light to those who do not know Jesus if we do not show them love. Not one of us is more important than the other, so let us all humbly stand up for what God says is right and stand firm against the evils of this world as we show love to all of our brothers and sisters.

From one sinner, saved by grace, to God's children.

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