

January 29, 2017 – Youth Sunday



“Love in Action”

Sermons by Jamie Jones, Meg Smith and Carly Rapoport

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Jamie Jones

Last week I ran into a girl I used to be classmates with. One time, we were assigned a group project, which is intended to be worked on together. She told me she would help with it and yet, the day the project was due, I ended up turning in a project I had done completely by myself. We both received an A. I was so angry that I had done all the work by myself and that she received an A for something she didn't even do. When I saw her last week, I found that I was still angry and bitter towards her, but I realized my not being able to forgive was only hurting myself and preventing me from seeing this girl beyond her mistake.

While reading our passage for this Sunday, I thought about the question, “Do I love without limits?” Do I love even when I'm bitter or angry at someone? Now as a Christian, I think the answer should be yes; but honestly, I really struggle to love unconditionally, as I'm guessing you do too. To love unconditionally means that no matter our relationship or the other person's faults, we treat them with kindness and compassion. It seems like this should be a simple practice in theory. Yet, how can we move beyond our resentment in order to show love? I guess the answer, for me, has become the practice of letting go. It is the practice of loving without limits that our Scripture speaks to.

When I teach Sunday school I often have to put this into practice. I have many different types of kids that I have to treat completely the same. And truly I do love each of them but kids can push your buttons and try to provoke you. But I have to let it go in order to move past it and treat them with love and kindness. They are all lovable children who are still discovering how to be themselves and how to interact with one another.

People change people and that change is really good when we are changed through love. I have grown up in this church and have changed in too many ways to count. The way I acted when I was 13 is not the way I acted at 15 or even how I act now at 18. My interactions with you, my church family, have shaped how I treat others.

Through CAST, Youth Group, Teaching Sunday school and VBS, Participating in ACT, planning events, service projects, singing in choir, and talking to all of you I have learned more about myself with every program and every conversation what love is. And having grown up in this loving environment this has allowed me to have the strong foundation I need to love unconditionally.

We spread love into the world one person at a time. It is love that can become limitless and eventually reach every person. Loving without limits is about putting love into action and letting our actions benefit others. I see this happen each year when... in girl scouts, we hold Brownie or daisy events that show younger girls what scouting is all about. We inspired girls to love scouting and all the principles scouting holds. Including serving those around us and being kind toward one another. Girls that come to these events tell us that they love them with all their hearts and the leaders of these younger troops are always grateful to use for inspiring there girls.

Christian love is strong enough to move mountains. When we think about the Gospel stories of Jesus and his friends, we see that he befriends the underprivileged and the not so popular. Most people want to be friends with the best because we have this misconception that thriving means having everything and befriending the “popular people” in society will get us there. This makes us forget to love without limits. We get distracted by our wants and do not recognize those around us who need God's love.

But each year on our YSP trip, we are given the chance to follow Jesus and help those that are forgotten and misunderstood. For example, Three years ago we were able to help a woman and her elderly mother rebuild their house that had significant water damage due to a leaky roof. On our last day we had done all that we could and had made the house a home again. However, as we were leaving Nancy, the mother of the home owner, was saying she really wanted to have a door that would separate the hallway from the back of the house. She had bought all

the supplies needed to hang it. So as everyone loaded the car I ran inside along with another man from a different church. And we put the door up. I don't know exactly why that door was so important to her but when she saw the door on the hinges and it swung open her face beamed and I could tell that she felt loved.

I've also learned that love without limits can happen in the day-to-day and small interactions we have with people. One way I have found that I can slow down and notice those around me is by asking people how their day is. I frequently put this into practice when I see my close friends here at church. When we take time to ask, it tells that person that someone cares about how they feel and that they matter. A few years ago, I noticed one of my church friends looked a little down and when I checked in with her, she completely exploded with how horribly wrong her day had been and how nothing was going her way. I listened and chimed in to console her and by the end, she told me she felt better. Since then it has become a regular occurrence that when I see her, I ask about her day. When we take time to notice one another and show others kindness, it spreads love. Love can move a person's heart and lift them out of pain and loneliness.

Each of you have loved me with all of your hearts. You have taught me that love is an action that comes in so many forms. It is in a hug, a conversation, prayers, presence, advice, and friendship. You have given me the foundation I need to love others without limits. I feel your love as soon as I walk into this church, you support me and help me know that I matter. I want to thank all of you for your unconditional love and for teaching me what loving without limits is all about.

As I move on to the next chapter of my life, I carry what I learned here, about love without limits, from all of you. I can see myself walking up to strangers on my college campus and asking them how they are doing. I can see myself continuing to serve others ... spreading God's love without limits.

Meg Smith

This church is like a second home to me. So I often find myself thinking of everyone here as family rather than my fellow church goers. Owen, Carly, Emma, Jamie, and all the other Youth Group kids are my siblings. For example, right now Jamie is helping me find a prom date. How's it coming Jamie?

I think of Adam, Tricia, Emily and all of the other Youth leaders as those cool aunts or uncles you love talking to and getting advice from. Whenever I find myself in a tough situation, they are the people I know I can call on.

Cindy, Carmen and all the other women who participate in ACT are my honorary moms. Maybe it's the fact that I often come home to see all of them dancing and singing in my living room, or maybe it's the fact that they are so kind hearted, but I love these women so much.

Pastor Robert is my honorary dad. He has the best dad jokes in the world and gave me a really embarrassing nickname that I secretly love. He calls me Meggo My Eggo.

These people, my church family has shaped me in so many amazing ways. I try to think back on one specific moment in which I've been shaped by this church, but the truth is that this church has been with me since the very beginning so there hasn't just been one moment in which it's shaped me.

So I want to say to everyone sitting in front of me today: thank you. You are the most loving, compassionate people I've ever known, and I'm the luckiest person in the world to have grown up in such an incredible community.

This community has also allowed me to question my faith as I've grown up. During times of hardship, the death of a family member, a difficult breakup, I haven't always felt so close to God. I've been angry at God, frustrated that I couldn't find the answers to my life's problems.

From this scripture, we know that God is calling us to let our love be genuine and love others in mutual affection. But that isn't always so easy. People argue, things get messy, our loved ones pass away, and sometimes that leaves me feeling like God isn't listening to my prayers.

So, in the song I'm going to sing for you in just a moment, I'm asking God to give me a sign. A sign that I'm on the right track. A sign that I'm going to be okay.

And although it doesn't always come right away, I do feel as though God shows me I'm going to be okay and things will work out. Whether it's a hug from a friend, an NYU college acceptance letter, a chance to share my music for others, God is there and loves us even when we don't realize it.

So without further adue, this is a song that I wrote, "Give Me A Sign."

Give Me a Sign by Meg Smith

Little girl just a few years old sings in the backseat
Doesn't know writing melodies and notes will soon be her dream
And in high school when she's deemed uncool
She'll write lyrics and put them to a tune
Guitar in hand she'll try to understand, she'll try to understand singing

Let love be genuine
Let love be kind
Let the weeping smile
And cure the blind

If you can turn water into wine
Can you give me a sign?
Oh Lord can you give me a sign?
Can you give me a sign?

Young girl, thirteen years old sings in the shotgun seat
These were years of crying tears of those who you didn't want to leave
And when they're gone all you do is write is write sad songs
Then happy ones when you think you might fall in love
Guitar in hand, I try to understand, I try to understand singing

Let love be genuine
Let love be kind
Let the weeping smile
And cure the blind
If you can turn water into wine
Can you give me a sign?
Oh Lord can you give me a sign?
Can you give me a sign?
Let love be genuine
Let love be kind
Let the weeping smile
And cure the blind
If you can turn water into wine
Can you give me a sign?
Oh Lord can you give me a sign?
Can you give me a sign?

Carly Rapoport

Hello church! My name is Carly Rapoport and I've been here since birth. I went to the preschool here and that's where my mom and dad soon discovered my disdain for being on stage or having to conform to any kind of group activity. During the Christmas pageant that happened on this very stage I screamed and cried until I spotted my mom and I ran off and collapsed into her arms.

That spring when my mom headed up the Preschool Mini March Fundraiser where we were sponsored for each time we marched around the circle, I laid in the middle of the March and screamed, "I...HATE...MARCHING!" From there I didn't go to Sunday school very often due to my shyness, although I will say Sandra Jones tried really hard to get me there.

Sometimes when I look back, I feel as though I've had many lives within one life.

I have my life here at church and my dad is Jewish so we celebrate the High Holidays. I feel blessed to have grown up in a home double-y rich in tradition and faith.

It always made me feel extra blessed and lucky that I was seeing the world from more than one perspective. I had my life at school, my time in Tennessee spent with my Papa and CeCe, my time spent in Chicago with my Dad's side of the family, visiting my Nonny, Aunts, Uncles and Cousins and my Pappy and his wife Sue. I would spend almost entire summers away all to come back here and readjust to life in Santa Monica which was always a bit of a challenge because... again... I was shy.

I tried going to Youth Group in 6th grade, but I didn't connect. That same year my parents were constantly telling me that I needed an after school activity, a sport, something creative- anything! Finally, we heard the church CAST program was doing the show "Godspell" and I decided to "Audition". I say "audition" because the director, Camille Mattick got me right away and didn't make me sing, but then when I cried that I didn't get a solo, she gave me a solo. That's who Camille was and she and Dorothy really gave me chances that maybe I wouldn't have gotten somewhere else.

I remember having a lot fun, but then came the day of the show and I got extremely nervous. I was really dramatic and tried to hide from my mom under my bed. My dad had to come and lift my 11 year old self into the car. I tried to escape from the moving car. Don't worry I didn't. My mom somehow got me here to the church, Camille sat me down and I don't remember exactly what she said, but I remember feeling like I couldn't let her down.

Next thing I know, I was up on stage dancing and singing. For many Sundays after that, people were coming up to me and my mom and dad saying, "Wow Carly really came out of her shell!"

Adam tells me I am an example of why we do CAST. I kept doing theatre for a while and then started to take dance classes at The Pretender's Studio where they not only teach the art of dance but also to "Dance for a Difference" placing importance on community service. Dancing has become a huge part of who I am.

When I turned 14, I decided to go on the YSP trip.

I remembered my mom enjoying them so much when she went on a couple as a counselor. I knew Meg and Jamie of course and was excited to go on the trip. It was the Sierra Service Project in Oregon. I ended up being super homesick and texted my mom and dad dramatic texts every night. And now I will read to you the series of texts I sent them.

"I'm miserable."

"Why did you send me here?"

"The person that's cooking thinks that if you turn the stove on higher that the food will cook faster."

"The food is burnt."

"The eggs are gray."

And one of the last texts I sent my mom went something like this,

"They took us up on a mountain to talk about God and the air was thick with these flies called Midgees- it was so disgusting! They went in my mouth and up my nose!" To which she responded, "Well, honey I'm sure it's challenging to talk about God with all those Midgees flying around."

The next year we were going to Tennessee for YSP and I was a little on the fence, but then they asked my mom to go because she's from Tennessee and I was in. Every year we have to get sponsors for our trip and I was always so lucky that family always donate which made me feel loved and supported. I didn't really talk to my mom that much, but instead I became really close with Emma. We were given the job to frame out a window, we laughed a lot and had so much fun.

A lot of times when an adult gives you an assignment, they end up doing it for you. Emily Miller is NOT one of those adults. We did it by ourselves. We were so proud and when we met the owners, it dawned on me that they would be watching the world go by through that window for years to come. That was a great feeling.

After we finished our work week, we drove to my Papa and Cece's house in Maryville, Tennessee. My Cece is actually here today.

I was so worried if the group was going to have fun. My Papa and Cece and Aunts and Cousins put on the biggest meal you've ever seen. Everybody LOVED IT! We drove the Golf cart around the field and had so much fun. It truly felt like all worlds colliding. All the love and support I got from my family and many of you here today have made it so that my youth group could help rebuild homes and then go visit my grandparents in Tennessee. How did this happen? I was connecting my life in Santa Monica with my life in Tennessee. My mom says that it's God's grace- something much bigger than us.

As I go on this journey called college I'm sure I will become even more appreciative of what I have had here. So far I've been accepted to schools in Portland, Chicago, and California.

I'm not sure how far out of my shell I actually want to go, but I'll keep you posted!

This summer I will be going on my final Youth Service Project trip and the coolest part is that my brother Leo will be going for the first time. Leo, my wish for you is that this will be the first of many.

In the beginning of my story I talked about my extreme aversion to marching as a small child. This is pretty ironic considering the fact that I participated in the women's march just last week alongside 750,000 women, children and men and loved it.

The scripture says, "Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everybody else believes is good." These words are definitely in keeping with the march because it was a peaceful protest and it made me feel empowered as a young woman. It gave me a sense of hope that I didn't have before. And one thing I know for sure is...I will keep marching. We must all keep marching.

Within the many lives of my life, when I was here, the church held me close even when I was a shyest of little girls. When I was away with family you kept me in your heart. And when I came back time and time again, you welcomed me with open arms. What the members of this church have given me throughout the years brings me back to today's scripture, "Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil and hold on to what is good. Love each other like members of your family." From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank my mom and dad and all of you for helping me become who I am today.