

Guided by Love, Driven by the Heart

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Do you hear the wedding bells ringing? It's that time of year! We have had 5 weddings since early June here at Meridian Street, that doesn't include Pastor Steve's daughter getting married last Saturday downtown. Love is in the air! We had a wedding yesterday here as well. My anniversary is this week. And I have heard that many of you have celebrated July anniversaries as well. Weddings pull at your heart strings, don't they? Certainly that's true for the parents and the occasional bride and rarely the groom, maybe we'll just say it does in their own way. They celebrate a deep love between two people who found in one another a friend, partner, and companion for the life journey. At least that's what I say to them during the ceremony. I always joke with the wedding party and couple during the rehearsal that I'll keep the sermon or homily to 30 minutes or less. I rarely get a laugh and you should see the faces on the father of the bride. I really do try to keep it short. During every wedding I officiate, I do make the point that we celebrate love: God's love for us and the love the couple has found in another. And I always point out that we love, because God first loved us.

That's one kind of love that's driven by the heart; relationships, marriage, and family. We have all experienced love in some form or another. Do you believe that all love is from God and has originated from God? "Let us love one another, because love is from God. God is love," we read in the pastoral letter from John. It all begins with God's love for us. In case we forget this fact from time to time, John makes it clear for us. God is love. We love, because God first loved us. Those that John was originally writing to in the first-century were conflicted about their community, even their theology or belief. John clearly focuses on who to love, but also where our desire and even our ability to love begins. It all begins with God.

When we think about love and especially charity or service as a response to that love, there's probably one person that comes to mind in our world today. As we continue to look into the lives of heroes of our faith this summer, today we're looking at a woman who was born Agnes in Macedonia in 1910. At the age of 12, she felt strongly the call of God on her life. She knew she had to be a missionary to spread the love of Christ. At the age of 18 she left her home in Macedonia and joined the Sister of Loreto, an Irish community of nuns. They ran a mission in India. After a few months of training, in 1931, she took her initial vows as a nun.

She taught high school for 17 years, but the poverty and suffering she saw made a deep impression on her. Some might say that she had her heart strings tugged. She left her order of sisters to start an open-air school for children in the slums. Eventually, she had volunteers and financial support that kept her mission going. In 1950, her group of sisters were recognized as an official order within the Catholic Church known as "The Missionaries of Charity." Her entire life was fully devoted to helping the poor, the sick, the needy, and the helpless. She was so devoted to this work that she was often hungry herself and would go without shoes so others would have some.

Shane Claiborne, author of several books and co-founder of the Simple Way, a Christian community in inner city Philadelphia that practices “new monasticism”, talks often about his experience of visiting Mother Teresa. He grew up in East Tennessee, went to college just outside of Philadelphia, and decided to visit her in India. It was kind of a big move, even if it was for a short time. He tells the story of when he finally found a phone number and called the convent of the sisters. A woman picked up the phone and he asked as kindly as possible if he could talk with Mother Teresa, and the older sounding, soft, yet firm voice, replied, “I’m Mother Teresa.” Kind of startled, Claiborne shares that he asked if he could come and visit her and she agreed. So he hopped a plane and visited The Missionaries of Charity in India.

While that’s an amazing story, he also shared another story about his experience when I heard him speak in person a few years ago. He noticed that when Mother Teresa would take off her shoes for daily prayer, her feet were twisted and misshapen. He eventually asked someone what was wrong with her feet. The person answered that the sisters relied on donations for everything, including shoes. When a load of donated shoes would come in, she would consistently choose the worst pair of shoes for herself. As a result, her feet had become worn by this. There were times when she wouldn’t even have shoes to wear.

After sharing this story, Claiborne asked, “What would the world be like if we all chose the worst pair of shoes for ourselves?” He was talking about more than shoes. He was talking about the radical power of sacrificial love. Not because it makes any good sense, but because God first loved us. Isn’t that what John was referring to in his letter? The central claim of our faith, where we’re always being drawn back to, is God’s love for us in Christ. First and foremost, we love, because God first loved us. It’s a matter of the heart. It’s central to our claim as a follower of Jesus Christ. At some point in our lives, just as Mother Teresa’s heart was tugged and pulled by God, I am certain that our hearts have been tugged too.

It can be hard to live by the heart. I tell the bride and groom at every wedding I officiate that there will be challenges and even conflicts in your journey together. When that happens always come back to love. For many us, me included, we can live in our heads rather than our hearts. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t think, reflect, and analyze, but we should note how something makes us feel. Know your heart. Experience God’s love. When we are driven by the heart, we’re guided by love.

We have been looking at heroes of the faith the last few weeks. We have used what’s known as the Enneagram as a way to learn more about them. The Enneagram is used as a tool for spiritual growth not something to replace other personality assessments. It includes 9 traits or types of personalities. It might help you understand yourself better, but if you don’t connect with it that’s alright too. I have been taught the Enneagram by Benedictine and Franciscan nuns as a part of my formation in spiritual direction. While it’s origin is somewhat unknown, and claims of its origins are varied, many of the scholars and authors that I have read regarding the Enneagram, like Rev. Ian Cron and Father Richard Rohr, trace the Enneagram back to, in part, the Christian desert monk Evagrius and the early Desert Fathers and Mothers. It has been developed over the years to the resources that we have today. There is an outline of the Enneagram on the back of your bulletin.

As we consider our next triad of the Enneagram, we'll notice that we're looking at heart people. Next week, Pastor Steve will get into our minds; actually he'll help us look at the Head Triad and what we can learn from those types. This week, as we look at the Heart, those tend to be people who are moved by the heart which include Type 2: The Helper; Type 3: The Performer; and Type 4: The Romantic. Again, as I shared last week, maybe you are in this Triad or maybe not, but it's still helpful to know where you or someone you know is coming from as they approach life or even a challenge. It's also good to learn from each part of the Enneagram and to learn how we might grow from it.

This week, our hero of the faith, Mother Teresa, is clearly found in the Heart Triad. She is a Type 2, which Ian Cron describes as The Helper or other versions of the Enneagram describe it as The Loving Person. Whether you are in this Triad or not, it's important to consider why and how we love. What we learn this week, and may even be challenged by is that it's fine to follow your heart and the call of love deep within from God. That's what we could take away from those in the Heart Triad of the Enneagram. Love like the kind that Mother Teresa lived with and many others, can never originate in us alone. All we can do is open our hearts and our lives up to love.

The author of Deuteronomy challenges us by reminding the reader of the offer given to us of life or death. "I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, but if your heart turns away..." we read in this chapter. You have within the capability to love, because God has first loved you. We are the beloved called to know love and offer love. Mother Teresa was one who was driven by the heart. We now know, after peering into her journals and learning more about her life that she doubted and struggled with faith, just like the rest of us. While we put her on a pedestal and call her a saint and a hero, she was driven by the heart.

Who in your life are those people who are driven by the heart and guided by love? I'm sure you know many. There are many here at Meridian Street who are guided by love and drive by the heart. People who have big hearts. To sleep here overnight for our Interfaith Hospitality Network families, they are guided by love and driven by the heart. For those who cook, clean, setup, and serve with IHN, they are guided by love and driven by the heart. Those who will be serving in Bolivia or serving across the street, we love, because God first loved us, all of us can be guided by love and driven by the heart. Mother Teresa once said, "I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world." That's being driven by the heart. Remember you have the capacity to be love. Because God first loved us, we can be guided by love and driven by the heart.

I officiated another beautiful wedding at Meridian Street yesterday. While it was hot, the sun was shining into this beautiful space. I ended yesterday's wedding sermon like I do many of those messages, "May you choose each other, may you choose God, may you choose joy, and may you choose love." Friends, may be guided by love and be driven by your hearts. When we love one another, we re-present God to the world. And we are able to do this because God first loved us. May you allow God's love to overflow in your hearts. May you choose God. May you choose to live by your hearts. May you choose love today and always. Amen.

Let us pray:

Help us to love, O God, because you have first loved us. Flood our hearts with your Spirit and life, where love will spill out of everything we are and do. You have given each us hearts to live and move with compassion, forgiveness, and love for all of your people, so give us the courage and ability to trust those hearts you have given us. Thank you, Holy One, for your love this day and always. Amen.