

Sermon for Sunday April 29, 2012 I John 3:16-24 "Talk is Cheap"

Eastertide is the season of the kingdom come, the time when Jesus Christ's resurrection marks our salvation. It is a time of rejoicing – thus the white vestments of celebration and joy – and a time to say that God's kingdom is revealed here on earth. And yet our world today seems to have little of divinity about it...it seems to be more of a place of war at its worst and incivility at its most common, of an ever-increasing gulf between those who have wealth and power and those who have neither, of misuse of God's creation for short-term pleasure without a mind for the impact it will have on our children and grandchildren.

Where is the resurrection majesty in this world?

Where is the kingdom come?

Jesus weeps...but this pattern of forgetting the gift of the resurrection is sadly not new. War is not new. Economic disparity is not new. Destruction of God's beautiful earth is not new. We seem to not learn from our mistakes, even though Jesus gave us clear instructions to heal our relationship with God and with each other.

And yet, here we sit on Sunday morning, good Christians that we are. We want to live as resurrection people. We want to be the people that God created us to be. We want to be a part of bringing the kingdom to our world.

The good news is that we are here, and together we might learn how to do this.

In John's Epistle, he makes clear that we should not just talk the talk, as the saying goes. We should walk the walk. We should live our lives in love. John says "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?"

And yet, we seem to have forgotten about that.

We live in a world where Ayn Rand's view of the primacy of individual wants and needs trumps generosity. We live in a time when care is taken to protect the wealth of those who already have more than they need, and the ones who have great need are left to fend for themselves. And not only do we fail them, sometimes we even revile them, saying that they should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, or that they are lazy, or that they could find a job if they really wanted to. And that may be true in a few cases. But we also know that there are people who are out of work because their company downsized and at the age of 55 no one is willing to offer them another job. There are people who worked in a job with certain skills that are no longer necessary and they don't have the resources to be retrained. There are people who are sick enough that they cannot hold a regular job, but Social Security will not approve their disability claim. And some of them sit in these pews, although you may not know it.

John says our way should be a different way.

And we already have an idea of this...why else would we be working to stock the shelves at Lamb's Basket, or making

sandwiches on Saturday morning, or preparing to welcome homeless guests through CARITAS?

We understand this is our way. John said it: "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another." Laying down our lives in this time and place may not be dying for one another, but it may be living our lives in such a way that we lay down our wants and needs until after we have served another's wants and needs. And we do this because we recognize the great gift of the love of God moving in us and through us.

If we are grateful for God's love, for Jesus's laying down his own life to redeem us for our sins, we can do no less.

The love we get causes us to want to give love. We cannot give our love back to God directly. We can only give it back through God's creatures. We can only give it back by offering to others the love we've received.

And that brings me back to the world in which we live, and the many ways we fall short. Because if we truly believe God loves us, and that God expects we share that love, we must believe that the rest of creation, all of God's creatures, are a part of that circle of love. No one and no thing stands outside of the circle. God loves it all. And if the world as we now live in it sets up systems in which some of God's creatures are shoved outside what we perceive as the circle of God's love and favor, and if we tolerate those systems, we are the ones who are ejected from that circle. We are not part of it because we are not living in the

circle of God's love and favor. We have forgotten how to love as God loves us.

In his essay entitled "An Experiment in Love," Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us how love can change the world. He describes a love in action which is creative, generative and healing. That kind of love "is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative. It is not set in motion by any quality or function of its object. It is the love of God operating in the human heart."

If we want to walk the walk about loving the world as God loves each of us, we need to keep on walking the walk. We need to put our wants and needs down for a moment, and pick up the wants and needs of a troubled world and respond to them.

If you're sitting here today, here's an idea: worry a little less about fixing yourself to make yourself right with God. Fix the brokenness in the world with love and care, and whatever needs correcting in your heart will be cured. Lay down your lives, and your wants, and your questions. Just lift up the lives of others who have less than you do, and it will be a kingdom moment. God's love will be moving in you and will be you and will come back to you, more than you could ever imagine.

Amen.