

TEXT: Romans 13:8-14  
THEME: Love fulfills the law  
SUBJECT: Love  
TITLE: The Neighbor

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
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Messiah Moravian  
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The noted psychiatrist, Carl Jung, said: “In my medical experience as well as in my life I have again and again been faced with the mystery of love, and have never been able to explain what it is. Love ‘bears all things’ and ‘endures all things’ (1 Corinthians 13:7). These words are all there is to be said; nothing can be added to them.” Maybe not, but that leaves me a few words shy of a sermon.

Victor Frankl, another noted psychiatrist and a survivor of Auschwitz, wrote: “A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth. Love is the ultimate and highest goal to which humanity can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: the salvation of humanity is through love and in love.”

Two thousand years before these famous psychiatrists, the priests of the modern age, made their discoveries, Saint Paul wrote: “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

We Protestants, as inheritors of the Reformation’s juxtaposition of law and gospel, tend to have a negative view of the law. Matthew tells us Jesus

came not to do away with the law, but to fulfill it. Both Jesus and Paul believed the law was fulfilled through and in love.

The law of God was given for life. It was not given as an arbitrary restriction of our freedom or to throw cold water on a good time. Fulfilling this law is how one lives a fulfilled life. The law of God is like the laws of physics. Just as we defy the law of gravity to our own peril, so we transgress the law of God to the peril of our souls.

If we have known for over three thousand years, if the high priests of the modern age rediscovered what the prophets of old knew, that love is the salvation of humanity, why are we in such a mess?

May I suggest a couple of reasons. St Augustine reminds us, the longest journey many of us will ever take is the journey from our heads to our hearts. What he meant was, we know a lot more than we ever do.

If we are honest, we must confess we are not so sure our salvation lies in and through love. The way we live, what we actually do, reveals a greater faith in power, money, and fame than in love.

Another challenge lies in our romantic notion of love. Bearing all things, enduring all things, doesn't conjure up images of candlelit dinners, grand cru wine with a cassoulet in an outdoor Parisian cafe. Bearing and enduring all things more likely conjures up images of dirty laundry and bed

pans. A romantic notion of love has tripped up countless relationships. We find it very hard to bear the loss of that loving feeling, not to mention the challenge of enduring the inevitable differences that arise along the way.

The toughest challenge love faces, however, is the neighbor. Kierkegaard tells the parable of two artists. The first artist said, "I have traveled much and seen much in the world, but I have sought in vain to find a person worth painting. I have found no face with such perfection of beauty that I could make up my mind to paint it. In every face I have seen one or another little fault. Therefore I seek in vain." Would this indicate that this artist was a great artist?

The second artist said, "Well, I have never traveled in foreign lands, nor studied the faces of those beyond the little circle of people who are close to me. I have not found a face so insignificant or so full of faults that I still could not discern in it a more beautiful side and discover something glorious. Therefore, I am happy in the art I practice. It satisfies me without my making any claim to being an artist."

Would this not indicate that precisely this one was the artist, one who by bringing a certain something with him found then and there what the much-traveled artist did not find anywhere in the world, perhaps because he did not bring a certain something with him!

Would it not be sad, too, if what is intended to beautify life could only be a curse upon it, so that art, instead of making life beautiful for us, only fastidiously discovers that not one of us is beautiful.

Would it not be sadder still, and still more confusing, if love also should be only a curse because its demand could only make evident that none of us is worth loving? Instead love's being is recognized precisely by its loving enough to be able to find some lovable-ness in all of us, consequently loving enough to be able to love all of us.

We fulfill the law by loving enough to recognize the lovable-ness in our neighbor. We are saved, then, by moving from this recognition to acting for the health and well-being of our neighbor.