**Worship Devotions for October 25 2020**

*Set aside some time and space for this worship time. You can light a candle or be outside or find a comfortable space. Do what you can to make it a sacred space and time. A suggestion: find a way to play some music during this time to begin this worship time and/or to end it. You can also go to our webpage* [*www.umchapelvalley.org*](http://www.umchapelvalley.org) *where there is a link to the Facebook page or go to the devotion page and there will be the recorded message of the week there or you can see it on You Tube that goes along with the devotion included here or you can go directly to our Facebook page,* [*www.facebook.com/chapelofthevalleyumc*](http://www.facebook.com/chapelofthevalleyumc)*. These are just aids to help you take some time to spend with God.*

**#Love Your Neighbor – Part 3**

**Call to Worship**

Do you love the Lord your God? Are you loving your neighbor as yourself? Let us begin to demonstrate our love through our worship today! A great and compassionate God loves us. Let us give God our love in return through this time of devotion. Join now and worship.

**Song** (read or sing the song) *Open Our Hearts*

Open our hearts, open our minds, open our lives to you O Loving God (Repeat)

*Words and Music: Jim Strathdee ©1997 Desert Flower Music*

**Prayer**

Gracious God, today we lift our prayers for all of your children. Arouse within us, we pray, our desire to love others as you have loved us. God, you ask us to forgive — as you so generously forgive us. Instead, we hold on to our anger, slights and grudges. If we don’t let them go, we can focus on the anger instead of the pain. Holding on to them also gives us a sense of power; so we let those feelings — instead of joy — rule our lives. We choose not to share the grace we have experienced or follow the example we’ve been taught. Change our hearts so we aren’t consumed by animosity and pain. Forgive us the harm we cause when we are unrepentant and unforgiving. May our lives reflect the forgiveness we have received from you.

O compassionate God, love us into a new way of being, the way that you commanded. Jesus loved You with all that he had. And he loved his neighbors — healing them, teaching them, calling them brothers and sisters. Let us follow his lead in loving you and loving our neighbor. Your love is poured out on the world, and we, in turn, are empowered to love extravagantly.

Beloved God, we continue to struggle with the Covid 19 pandemic, and when we think we are moving in the right direction, the numbers just keep growing around the country and the world. We pray for all those who have contracted this virus and are deeply affected by it. We pray for those family members, co-workers and friends who are afraid they can catch it too or can not be with their loved ones. We pray for those who are continuing to do the work to re-open businesses and schools and places of worship. We pray for all who are having to make the decision for their own health and the health of their family to continue to stay at home. We pray for those who are suffering mentally and emotionally because of this pandemic. We pray for all those who have lost loved ones. We pray for those working so hard to keep us all safe. We pray for all the leaders of our country as we wander through this pandemic crisis and all that it has done. It seems that are prayers remain the same, and why should we continue to ask over and over again…yet we know you hear our prayers and lifting these prayers matters to you and to us, so we will keep praying.

Lord, help us to find ways to be in community with one another. Inspire us to find ways to dialogue on the many issues of the day, especially as we move ever closer to the end of the election season. Help us to love even those we perceive to be our enemies. It seems as the days and weeks go on, we become entrenched in our “own side.” We differ on so many things that are so deeply affecting all of us. Continue to guide us and challenge us. Ease our fears and our pain. Help us to become engaged, following the path of Jesus, to reach out with compassion and love and kindness to your children around the community and your world

Pour out your Spirit upon us, that our worship might be joyful and authentic, bearing good fruit in our lives with our neighbors. Let each of us feel your tender embrace today.

Let these words reach you, as we pray them from our lips, our hearts and our souls as we say the pray Jesus taught us…(The Lord’s Prayer) Amen.

**Scriptures**

*Matthew 5:43-47a*

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?

*1 John 4:19-21*

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God’, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

**Special Music**  *Fierce Love* By Jim Strathdee

**Devotion** *Really…My Enemies?*

In the last of our three-part series #LoveYourNeighbor, we are going to be looking at loving our enemies. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells those listening some hard to hear truths. These teachings of Jesus are worth our contemplation as we seek to be a better person is his urging that we love our enemies. Not just “Love Thy Neighbor”, which in itself can be a difficult thing. But “Love your enemies”. That’s a powerful message, and it turns out, one of the greatest challenges in life.

When I was in 7th grade (or maybe 8th grade) I met Annette. Now I was a petite youth. Short, thin, not muscular at all. Annette on the other hand was tall, not overly overweight but on the larger size and definitely had muscles and broad shoulders. She was a black girl and the leader in her group. I was a leader type in my own crowd We both took the city bus to get to our junior high school. Her bus came from the eastside and my bus came from the westside. Somehow, I got on the bad side of Annette and then one day I bumped into her and made her drop books and stuff on the ground. I said I was sorry, but I probably said it in a flippant way as most 7th graders do when in the halls of school and talking with friends not paying attention. Well, apparently this was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back and she got in my face, looking down on me, and challenged me to a fight after school. I said no. She asked if I was chicken, and I said no, I just didn’t want to fight. I told her that I was sorry for bumping into her. We had a few choice words for one another, and then she said she wanted to hit me. I said go ahead if that would make you feel better but I was not going to hit back. She again called me chicken and I said I was not chicken because she was clearly bigger and stronger than me and I would probably get hurt worse if I fought back so if I just let her hit me once maybe it wouldn’t be so bad….chicken would be to run. She asked if I was going to tell on her. I said no because then Annette would just want to hurt me again. So, if I let her hit me, maybe it would be enough and be over with. A side note here…in my youth group we had just been studying the Sermon on the Mount and turning the other cheek. So, I thought I would try the whole non-violent approach and see if it would work. I know I shared that with Annette but I can’t really remember if it was before or after the punch was to come.I waited and the punch didn’t come, instead Annette started laughing and I kind of got a rubbing of my head. And people just walked away. Annette became a good friend and (in her words) my protector. We remained friends through mid. high-school until her family moved away back east somewhere. I must say, I am glad it worked because I probably would have been hurt.

Lincoln was quoted as saying, “Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?” and Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend.”

Now my story with Annette is not even close to showing love to your enemies on a grand scale. She had not hurt me or my family, nor I hers. Annette had done nothing to me nor had I done anything to her, it was a perceived competition between teenage girls, but it starts somewhere. I know in the world there is so much evil and violence. And there are stories of people much more heroic then me who turned the other cheek and showed love and mercy to their real enemies. However, we need to start with those close to us and work on the relationships of those around us and practice, so when the larger enemies come at us, we know the power of love and following Christ matters and it works.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,’” says Jesus. “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (vv. 43-45). Once again, Jesus gives us a response to adversity that is connected closely to the kindom of God. He is challenging us to love our enemies not because they are wonderful people who deserve to be loved but because they are children of God — we are to love them because God loves them. After all, says Jesus, God “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (v. 45).

This challenge is enormous because the fight-or-flight reaction is strong. We naturally want to run away or draw blood. But Jesus says no — try love. Try courageous, determined, committed love. I am not sure who said this but when someone quoted the Bible “an eye for an eye”…the person responded with “That just makes everyone blind.”

Loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us can lead to changes — in ourselves.

In his book The Magnificent Defeat, Frederick Buechner says that

“The love for equals is a human thing — of friend for friend, brother for brother. It is to love what is loving and lovely. The world smiles.

“The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing — the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world.

“The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing — to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich, of the black man for the white man. The world is always bewildered by its saints

“And then there is the love for the enemy — love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured’s love for the torturer.

This is God’s love. It conquers the world.”

Some argue that these commandments of Jesus actually turn his disciples into doormats for evil people who will take advantage of them. Standing there and just taking whatever it is that our enemies dish out is a sign of weakness. We're culturally conditioned to fight for our rights. No wonder that Jesus' approach seems unrealistic and even dysfunctional to many.

But rather than seeing these actions as signs of weakness, Jesus asserts that they're positions of strength. The way that Jesus confronts evil is not through violence, but through nonviolent resistance that will confound, shame and disarm the aggressor.

It is easier to say then to do I know. I am not as brave as I was in 7th grade to follow Jesus completely. My humanness comes out and fight or flight is real. We may know the why of it…to love our enemy as Jesus called us but the how is much more difficult. Let’s look at some possible ways to do just that.

1) Take a breath, pause and pray

2) Put yourself in their shoes

3) Seek to understand then move to accept

4) Forgive and then let go

5) Find something to love in that person and find common ground

To do these things it takes an open heart and an open mind. We cannot do it on our own, it takes the love of God, the example of Christ and the power of the Spirit.

This is the call we each have to Love God, Love ourselves and to love our neighbor including our enemies. If we start with our “Annettes,” and our families and then to those in our workplaces and communities and then move on from there, the world will be transformed. #LoveYourNeighbor…please God help us to make it so! Amen.

**A Blessing for Offerings**

*We invite you to take time to give thanks for offerings made. Again, you can make your tithes and offerings to the church by sending them in the mail, you can also drop it at the church during office hours or through Pastor office mailbox slot. You can also make a donation online at* [*www.umchapelvalley.org*](http://www.umchapelvalley.org)*. There are instructions for each method*

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

God of extravagant love, fill our spirits with your love and place upon our hearts your call to serve all in the name of Christ. We ask that you dedicate our gifts and our lives to faithful service and ministry. Amen.

**Song of Thanksgiving** (*sung to tune of Amazing Grace*)

Give thanks to God who blesses us,

And Jesus God’s Beloved,

And thank the Holy Spirit too, who guides us on our way.

**Closing Prayer**

As we part from this time of worship, be ever mindful in letting God’s light shine through you. Love God. Love yourself. Love your neighbors including those who you perceive as your enemies. Let love always lead. Go now in the deep and wonderful love of Jesus. Amen.

Next week is All Saints Day. We will be remembering all of those who have gone before us. The theme for the service is “Sinners and Saints.”