

**First United Methodist Church
618 Eighth Street
Columbus, IN 47201**

**Harriet Wilkin
September 10, 2023**

“Love Honorably”
Text: Romans 13:8-10

Have you ever noticed in older cookbooks, especially those from the days when women’s groups at churches would ask for recipes for the cookbook fundraisers, some recipes would call for a pinch of salt or dash of pepper – there was no measurement saying a teaspoon – just a pinch or dash.

There is a story that I read about 25 years ago that remains deep in my memory bank. The title of the short story is, “Martha’s Secret Ingredient,” by Roy J. Reiman. The story was published in the book *Stories for a Woman’s Heart*, compiled by Alice Gray.

Ben and Martha had been married for many years. When they were married Martha’s mother gave her a little metal container. No one else but Martha was to touch and/or open the container. Ben always wondered what was in the container, and every time Ben would ask Martha what was in the container, she would just say a “special herb.”

The container had been passed down from Martha’s grandmother to her mother and then to Martha. Whatever that “special herb” was, as far as Ben was concerned – Martha’s cooking and baking was great.

Then one day, Martha became ill, and Ben had to take her to the hospital. She needed to spend the night. When Ben returned home, he found the house to be extremely lonely. That was the first time that Martha was gone overnight. Plus, Martha did all the cooking and baking, so he didn’t ever need to worry about having something delicious to eat for his meals.

He started to look around the kitchen for something to eat. As he was looking, he saw that container. He tried to put it out of his mind.

Finally, he decided to eat a slice of cake.

But that container kept coming into view. What was that “special herb?”

Temptation got the best of Ben. He rose from the table and went over to the stove and took the container off the shelf above the stove. He opened the container. To his surprise there was nothing inside except a note from Martha’s mother.

“Martha – To everything you make, add a dash of love.”

Following instructions and rules is sometimes hard for us to do. There are times when we don't remember or want to even remember every rule. Then like the College Football games, we learn that rules can be changed from season to season.

In today's text from Romans 13:8-10, we are reminded of the commandments that were given to Moses on the stone tablets. When Christ was asked about which commandment was more important, he responded, Mark 12:30-31:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Paul is reminding the Roman Christians what it means to love. Paul even is reminding them what Christ said on the Sermon on the Mount – Matt 5: 43-44

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Paul was speaking to people who saw what the culture was in that day and they were trying to figure out how they are going to walk the journey with Christ, keep the law of love, and be in their community.

We owe it to ourselves to love who we are. To take care of our physical health, mental health, and our overall happiness. Much of this gets lost in translation in our world when instead one's image of what perfection is supposed to look like takes priority over the importance of a balanced meal and balance of care for ourselves, (movement and being with the people who love us for who we are).

When it comes down to it - love is the bridge in any relationship - personal (how we care for ourselves), with the Divine, and how we treat the other person AKA our neighbor.

Not romantic love, but a genuine love that keeps no records of wrong. A love that is open to new possibilities. A love that doesn't hinge on the past, but rather recognizes peace and kindness.

When is Love the Answer

When we personally feel afraid, **love one another**

When you or someone you know feels lost, **love one another**

When you feel alone, **love one another**

When you feel far from home, **love one another**

When you feel low and blue, **love one another**

When all your hope seems lost, **love one another**

When you need the comfort of a friend, **love one another**

All we need to do is love, we need to **love one another**

Each day we are given the opportunity to start from scratch.

We have the opportunity to change a person's life...

To be a positive influence --to take a negative incident and turn it into a positive - it might take a lot of patience on our part - but that's what it means to love our neighbor.

We don't know what the day has in store for us when we wake up in the morning. But we have a new opportunity to do something positive, even correct a wrong, and ask for forgiveness. It's up to us how we want to start the day from the blank page before us.

Story from the book - *Jesus freak: feeding, healing, raising the dead*, by Sara Miles

This is one of many stories from the book on showing love - how a group of youth from the high school better known in the area as "last chance" went to help out at the food pantry - while there it was time for lunch. The adults pulled out the meal to share with the youth. The tables were brought together. But it was what happened next that changed the teenagers' lives. The food wasn't just placed on the table. The utensils weren't just laid out. The plates weren't just provided.

What made the teenager's feel the most welcomed and wanting to come back to help some more - the adult leadership at the food pantry where the youth were helping - placed a tablecloth on the table. That simple act of taking the time of placing a tablecloth on the table made the greatest impact.

The book *Miss Brenda and the Loveladies* by Branda Spahn and Irene Zutell – is about a woman who was facing time in prison after having a life of wealth. She was spared from going to prison; however, she did change her life to where love became abundant and she shared that love with other ladies who were coming out of the prison system by helping them navigate the world outside of prison. There were several obstacles that they had to overcome in order to transform their lives in a world that was foreign to them after being in prison. With Brenda's help and several other people who Brenda brought along on this journey of love, the house of the Loveladies, The Lovelady Center, became a community where fear and doubt were put to rest and where kindness, peace, hope and joy lived.

What does love have to do with the idea of feeling at home?

To be at home also means to be in the place we love and to be with people who love us for who we are.

Love and home are then one in the same. To have that feeling of love and home and what that looks like:

- to be cared for
- to be recognized and accepted for who we are
- to feel as though we are being comforted and not alone
- to know that even when things aren't perfect - there is hope, joy, peace, kindness whereby loneliness doesn't creep in

What about love?

Why is love harder at times to express? Is it because we need to let our guard down and be open - to open our hearts - so that we can truly open the doors to new thoughts and possibilities? So that we can hear the needs of others?

Ways of showing love:

- Visiting Team
- Small Groups
- Caring for the Caregivers, Widows and Widowers
- Children and youth - to listen, to encourage, to lift up in prayer, to support financially

Helping others:

- Mountain Mission collections
- Prayer Shawl
- Hot Meals

As we are part of these groups, taking care of these groups, supporting these groups through prayer and financial giving, we are building relationships of love.

Whereby, we are then following the law of loving our neighbor.

Prayer: Rooted and Grounded in Love:

Lord, we come to you...

From far and near, yet through the distances that we come you call us together, to be rooted and grounded in our community with love.

From discontent and disconnection, you call us together, to be rooted and grounded in our community of support.

From division and discord, you call us together, to be rooted and grounded in our community that surrounds us with care.

Gracious God, ground us so firmly in the soil of your love, that we know the deep truth of your compassion and the firm foundation of your grace. Knit us together by the power of your love and the strength of your Holy Spirit, that we may be one with each other, one with your Spirit, and one in ministry to all the world.

Amen.

Invitation to Offering:

We are to love God and one another. Let us give with generous hearts. Sharing our love with our neighbor.