

Loving One Another...It's That Easy and That Difficult

By Dan Richert

1 John 4:7-21

I finally got an easy passage for a change. Partly because I got to pick it. However, this scripture feels a bit like an ultimatum. "Whoever loves God must also love his brother." Brother could be your neighbor. And that seems like a hefty ultimatum. Love is not black and white, it comes in shades of grey like the rest of life.

So exactly how are you suppose to reach this pure love? The perfectionist in me wants to know the exact steps. However, the more I thought about it the more I realized I did have a process. Through mistakes, through disappointments, like we all have I was following my own steps. One is choice. When certain moments happen we have a choice on how we respond in the present and future.

For instance, you can choose to use your disappointments or mistakes as opportunities to be vulnerable. It brings people closer together. When you're vulnerable, the individual sharing may feel weak, but that is when the group is at its strongest. I remember one chapel as a RJC student where each staff member got up and said something like Hi I'm Lloyd and I'm a failure. This was Lloyd Schmidt who taught math at RJC for many years. But he got up and told how us he failed a university math class. Lloyd, who seemed to know everything about math, had at one point failed at it. And that stuck with me. If he can fail and still succeed in life then so can I. So following that theme I want to share some stories. Each one dealing with vulnerability in a different way.

Story #1 – Grandpa in Dalmeny

My grandfather passed away in April of 2016 and before that he stayed in the hospital for a couple of months. Staying in the hospital is never fun. I've actually never stayed in a hospital overnight. Maybe I need to get out more. But I'm pretty sure I'm going to be a grumpy patient. My grandfather was a pretty good patient. Always having a positive attitude. While he was there, I was on campaign trail but I would drive down to Swift Current whenever I could to visit him. Part of me regrets not visiting him more often. Despite a very slim chance of winning an election, I had chosen to knock on doors and campaign. Something I sometimes regret. In one particular visit grandpa told me about a dream he had. He dreamt he had come to my campaign office in Dalmeny. In his dream he had come straight from the hospital to Dalmeny. So he still has his hospital band on. And as he got out his car and walked to my office, Brad Wall suddenly appeared. Well this was grandpa's moment. In a fit of protest, I don't know maybe against the health care system subconsciously, he raised his arm with the hospital band on it, raised it so Brad Wall would notice him and proceeded to silently cut off the hospital band on his wrist. We joked about that one for a while. And what made it so funny was that my grandfather was in a pretty vulnerable state. But during those painful moments, when things seem pretty dark, moments of joy are so bright and can bring you closer together.

Story #2. Life reminds us we are human

It was 2001. It was my second year at CMU. At the end of the year the choir I was in, was on tour. We were somewhere in Ontario at some seniors complex. Now at this point in the year we had done so many concerts that we had all the songs memorized. Can't believe that. Anyway, Dietrich Bartel was the conductor. So before the performance he went through the order. The first song, can't remember the name of it, but it starts with the basses, that my section, with a middle d, accapella, singing the words I believe. So we get out there, in front of all the residents. Now if you have ever seen Dietrich conduct it's a whirl wind of arms and hands. So he waves his hands, and I'm ready and I sing a middle d. "I believeeeee." It did not take me very long to figure out I had the wrong song. And the difference in volume between the two songs was pretty big. I proceeded to gracefully(sarcasm) slide into the right note and right song. "I believeeeee.... Sanctus." I can't remember if anyone in the audience caught on, partly because I was so enveloped in my own mistake. The choir however, could not make it through an entire song without laughing.

This story sometimes makes me wonder, is that all I do, just keep making mistakes? But it reminds me that I am human, that it's ok make mistakes. Accepting and loving yourself. Besides mistakes make life interesting and sharing them is how we best relate to each other.

Story #3 Eye Rolling

During my grandfather's final months in the hospital, extended family came to visit a lot. Now, like everyone, I have cousins, or aunts and uncles that I just don't get along with. We have different religious and political views. One of my dad's cousins, who is a pastor and who has very different views than me, came to visit along with his wife. With any hospital visit it's never easy. Standing around someone laying in a bed is not really an ideal social situation. I mean would could have a potluck where everyone lies down, but then no one will leave.

Anyway, before these family members were about to leave the cousin said he would like to pray over grandpa. My dad who was there, and me, collectively rolled our eyes. Great, what is he going to say. But as we gathered around my grandfather and stood there while this cousin prayed I could see how much it meant to my grandfather. And I don't remember all the words, something about being thankful for a good life. But I do remember the cadence of the cousin's voice. And the rhythm of the words, the poetry. Afterwards we were all in tears. And I realized I had never felt so close to these family members. And now when I see them, which is not often enough, I have this connection with them. It's weird. But a good weird.

And I've used these moments to help me through difficult times. The moments of mistakes, joy, and vulnerability to help me let go of grievances. The past two years for me have had a number of bumps. A number of personal and professional disappointments. In particular there was a job I wanted, something I had worked hard to get, but it didn't turn out the way I wanted it to.

And it was a painful experience because of the time and emotion I had invested. I was angry and depressed about it for a while, but I realized that is not who I am. And a story that ends in anger doesn't fit well with the rest of the stories I told you. So I made a choice. And I realized I had been in this situation before. No steps needed. And I realized that if I wanted to continue along the path I had started I needed to make the right choice. So I moved forward forcing myself to see the bigger picture and to use past experiences to do that. In other words loving one another becomes a difficult choice that only becomes easy with practice. May we walk with each other as we struggle to make the difficult choices. Amen

Benediction

In this imperfect world filled with uncertainties may we be strong enough to share our faults and allow the perfect love of God to help us love one another. Amen.