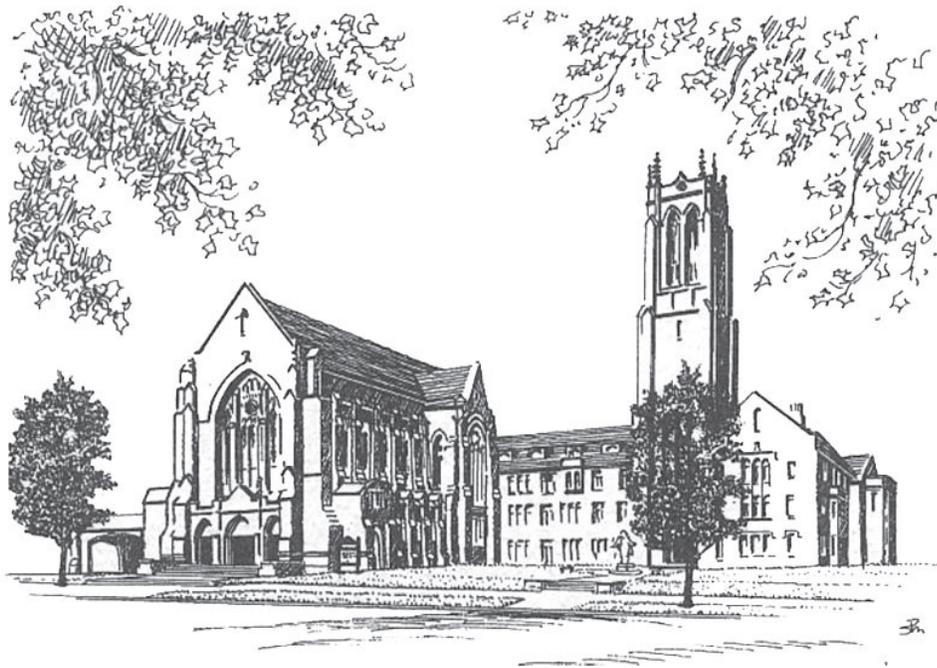


YOUTH WITNESS
by
Kayleigh Latimer
February 19, 2017
Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
8:30 am



ST. PAUL'S

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Texts: Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18 • Psalm 119:33-40 • 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23 • Matthew 5:38-48

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.

You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord. You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Psalm 119:33-40

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.

Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.

Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you.
Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good.
See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Matthew 5:38-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

"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 perse-

cute 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?

“Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Youth Witness

by Kayleigh Latimer

Hello my name is Kayleigh Latimer and I am a junior at Lamar High School. I've been going to St. Paul's since I was a baby and have grown up here along with a lot of the other youth participating in the service.

I broke my toe running around like a hooligan with Hank on our mystery trip, I changed lives with Sara on JUMMP in College Station a few summers ago, and I beat Sam playing soccer in Bolivia more times than I will disclose to spare his feelings. I have been blessed enough to grow up in this support system of caring and amazing people, and I love being around my second family, whether we are passing the Christ candle on trips or passing the donuts on Sunday mornings.

A lot of people in the world are born into families or lives where they never get the chance to know God. I was fortunate enough to be born in Houston, Texas, just a few blocks away from the church that I inevitably would grow up in. I've always had people like Tiffin, Mac, or Jennifer at church and in my life to teach me important lessons like: God's grace is always there; you just have to ask for it. Love your neighbor like you love yourself. And don't end up in a dodgeball game against Sam.

This morning we read Matthew 5:38-48, and in this passage God asks us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, and that's where things get a

bit more complicated. Loving your neighbor as you love yourself can be easy when I'm sitting next to Benji or Whitney. But what about loving your enemy? If you were sitting next to your enemy, would you be able to love them?

Now I am going to tell y'all something, and I'll deny it if anyone tells Mac, but back in Confirmation every now and then we would disagree with a point or start debate just to cause trouble. How do I say this nicely? We were being smart alecks.

Now if you walk into Confirmation and tell a bunch of squirmy hyper sixth graders that they have to love their enemies like they love their neighbors, you're gonna get responses like "so if someone kills my whole family and takes my food do I have to love them?" According to this verse yes, and if that murderer tells you to run a mile, apparently you are supposed to run two. I don't know how the Lord expects me to run two miles, I can barely get up the stairs without going into cardiac arrest.

I digress. My point is that it was difficult as a young person to digest that I was supposed to love my enemies like I loved my friends. Even now I am a year away from adulthood, and I still can't quite grasp the concept.

In the verse it says that if someone slaps you on your right cheek, you should turn and offer them the other cheek. Let me just tell you when girls at Lamar get slapped on the right cheek, they don't turn the left cheek and offer it up to their enemies. They say someone hold my earrings. I've seen enough fist fights at school to know that loving your enemy is not something practiced by many, because in all honesty it's difficult. Looking at someone who wronged you and feeling no hatred or anger toward them, but only love and kindness is challenging.

One of my all-time favorite movies is *The Help*, I am half way through the book, but that's slowly becoming one of my favorites as well. The preacher in the movie tells the church that if you can love your enemy you already have the victory. In November of 1975 in Montgomery, Alabama, Dr. King gave a sermon on this very topic and spoke on this very verse. I read his sermon out of curiosity, and what stuck out to me was when he began to talk about the verse and he said, "we cannot dismiss this passage as just another example of Oriental hyperbole."

Big words this early in the morning!

Throughout the sermon Dr. King repeatedly says that God is not playing. I think that what he was trying to get across is that so many times we read God's word and think, "Oh, this doesn't directly apply to me or that was so long ago and times are different now." Just because we no longer have to ride donkeys around and we have cell phones doesn't mean God's word should have any less impact on the way we live.

People of St. Paul's UMC, allow me to reiterate Dr. King's words when I say God's not playing! You need to try to love your enemies, and there's no way around that.

Okay, great Kayleigh. Super, the Bible tells us to love our enemies, but how do we go about doing it?

The how of loving your enemies is the nitty gritty complicated part. It's easy to say you are going to love your enemies and act like you do, but deep down in your heart do you really love them?

If your nemesis was sitting right next to you, could you love them like you love whoever you came to church with this morning?

Benjamin Franklin said you must love your enemies because they tell you your faults. Now I don't know about y'all, but if my enemy were to start telling me about my flaws, someone's right cheek would most definitely get slapped. I think the deeper meaning behind this, however, is that when you look at your enemy you have to wonder how they became your enemy in the first place.

Did they do something to you?

Could there have been some other reason behind what they did?

Or maybe you did something to them.

Ask yourself what this person does to make you tic. Maybe it's the way they act or something about them. In fact think of someone who just gets your goat like nobody's business. Now think of what it is that has you so tiffed about this enemy. Maybe it's your boss, and he talks down to you. Or maybe it's your neighbor and she judges you. I can practically see the steam coming out of your ears. Now imagine

how you feel, that cruddy I-can't-stand-this-person feeling and stop to wonder that maybe that's what they feel for you.

What if your condescending boss doesn't think you respect him or your judgey neighbor thinks you hate her flower bed?

What if, when a 17-year-old girl at her youth-led service asks them to think of someone who bothers them, they think of you?

What could you be doing to change this situation?

Now being the bigger person is no easy task, but what if you just loved them?

What would happen if you went up to your worst enemy and said, "I hope you have a wonderful weekend and you are blessed with amazing things?" how would they react?

Maybe your boss would see that you do respect him and maybe even if her flowers are atrocious your judgey neighbor may be a lot nicer.

The phrase "killing with kindness" cannot be emphasized enough. There are so many weapons now a days like guns, knives, bombs, nuclear warheads, and those iPhone chargers you might step on. But the greatest weapon is kindness because it can kill hate.

This morning I encourage you to offer up your left cheek so to speak. If someone honks rudely at you on your way home from church today, offer them a smile. If someone insults you, ask them how they day has been. And if someone takes the last donut in youth group, let them have it without conflict. Then send Tiffin to get more donuts.

Thank you.