

St James United Church



Message for June 14, 2026

Third Sunday after Pentecost

“Sent Out in Love” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Genesis 18:1-16; Matthew 9:35-10:15; and an excerpt from Dorothy Day, *The Reckless Way of Love*

I know I'm dating myself, but did you see the movie “Moulin Rouge” back in 2001? It starred Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor. There is a scene where they are talking about love, singing about it actually, quoting different songs, like The Beatles’ “All You Need is Love” and Joe Cocker’s “Love Lifts Us Up Where We Belong.” They do it because there are more songs written about love than any other theme, proving Dorothy Day right. All any of us wants is to love and be loved, even the most ardent revolutionist just trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love.

At the heart of any call for social change is a call to love. And boil it down and love is core to what we've been discerning together as a congregation, pondering what our ministry should be about in the next two, five, ten, twenty-five years. It is really a consideration of how we are being called to love - to love each other, love our neighbours, love this world. And love isn't just feelings or thoughts or nice words. We know we are loving or are loved by our actions, how we embody love in concrete ways. That's what we see in Genesis 18 as Abraham welcomes three strangers that are actually divine visitors. He gets them some water to wash, invites them to rest and has a wonderful meal prepared, all to show the three of them they are welcome, are loved. The result of that is abundant life, where even a couple who thought they'd never have a child, do. Love extends beyond us to embrace others across time as well as space, seeking the flourishing of others, nurturing new life.

Which suggests that blocking love, not welcoming or caring for others is a dead end, ultimately is death-dealing. We get a hint at that at the end of this reading as the three visitors go on to Sodom. As I've discussed with you before, the sin of the legendary Sodom and Gomorrah wasn't homosexuality but injustice and inhospitality. According to Jewish tradition, they were notoriously hostile to strangers for fear that they'd steal from them. They're said to have put their names on coins given to beggars so merchants would know not to serve them and then when they'd starved to death they could get their coins back. They even made charity a capital offense. According to the Talmud it was the cry of Lot's daughter as she was executed for helping someone in need that alerted God to visit Sodom in the first place, and we know the result of their being closed, so full of fear and suspicion. It leads to death and destruction.

In contrast, Jesus was open, full of love and a desire to connect with others. He didn't just think it but put it into action, naming as apostles people from varied backgrounds, different classes and conflicting politics. Jesus knew they needed to be reconciled, to be able to welcome each other in love and view each other as siblings as an initial embodiment of God's kin-dom. Then he sent them out to extend the same love as they cured the sick and liberated people from the powers of evil, less

about physical healing than restoring relationships. It's tempting to question why Jesus tells them to go only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Isn't he being fearful, suspicious? No. He's had positive encounters with Gentiles and Samaritans and they're coming to him. But Jesus knows that the twelve are fearful so it wouldn't be positive. Besides, I think Jesus understands that both Gentiles and Samaritans have life-ways, faith traditions that serve them. He doesn't need to impose on them.

His concern is for the lost sheep of Israel because they have been hurt by the religious leaders who allied with Roman authorities to impose policies that brought hardship. He sees that and so knows that they are the ones most in need of compassion in order to flourish, to experience the abundant life, the deeply caring community, at the heart of God's kin-dom. And as they experience that, the love that's restored between them will spill out and Samaritans and Gentiles will experience God's kin-dom too. Note that Jesus sent apostles. We think of disciples and apostles as the same, but a disciple is learning from a teacher, seeking to be like them; an apostle is sent by that teacher to live what they've learned. And there's another aspect. Apostles are witnesses of the resurrection, tying the commissioning in this story to what happens later, as they preach that God's kin-dom is born out of the resurrection. Jesus being raised is a sign that the way of love, of reconnecting people didn't die on the cross. Jesus was with them, his ministry alive in them as they extended his love in new ways.

This is where we come in, called to be his apostles, bearers of the promise that his way of love wins. The alliance between the religious and Roman authorities to kill Jesus only appeared to win, just as any aligning with power in our day still only appears to win but really only promotes the dead end of fear and suspicion. Our job is to embody Jesus' way of compassion and love, be people who connect others together as a sign of God's kin-dom. Our love can't just be a feeling or nice words either. It needs to be concrete as we imitate Abraham and Sarah, not just loving each other, although that's part of it, but creating a space where everyone feels welcomed, really loved. It continues as we model Jesus and connect with each other across backgrounds, classes, identities and life-ways, listening to each other as we break down the tendency toward suspicion and fear. Then we model the apostles, go to the neighbourhood and get to know people living nearby, see how we can help. Over the summer and into the fall, we are looking for small teams of people to do just that, walking the neighborhood once a week to meet our neighbours, not to impose but if they're interested tell them about St. James, perhaps about our labyrinth, or Pub Theology, or something else that interests them, taking our cue from Jesus to listen to what their needs are, discern as well other things we could do as a support to their flourishing, and consider where we can come alongside what they're doing and amplify their loving work in the community. That's how we concretely show our love for them, as together we nurture abundant life for everyone, and thing.

We all need love, and not just love of family as Dorothy Day reminds us, but love in the widest sense, love that lifts everyone up and responds to their needs, love that listens and extends compassion, that wants everyone to feel welcome, love that builds bridges. That is what we are to be about. Jesus sent his apostles into the neighbourhood to be messengers of God's kin-dom, and he sends us too. So, let's go! Amen.