

Good Morning,

It is good to see you all here this morning, despite the snow, its beautiful outside. I have been away the last few weeks visiting some friends and family and recovering from covid. That stuff really is no joke.

As I was laying and thinking about how unpleasant that covid experience was I was thinking about how long we have all been suffering from the effects of covid. As a church community, as a country, the planet. 2 years, 2 years. I wonder if there will be any among us years from now, who will look back and say wow 2020, 2021, 2022 those were some really good years for me.

This has affected us all, differently, yes, but this has affected us all nonetheless.

There have only been a few things in our history that have affected everybody in the world. The magnitude, the significance cannot be understated.

I remember way back at the beginning of this all, 2 years ago, folks were asking me, what does this mean. And then a few weeks after that they asked what did you learn. And I would say what do you mean, what have we learned, we are still in the midst of it. How do we begin to process when its still happening? Yeah, that doesn't mean I hadn't thought about it. But now, we are still in the midst of it. Except now it's been two years.

I think its time be a little more self-reflective, more prayerful. We need to go to God now more than ever.

Because we need God's help. We need to ask God for guidance, for God to reveal those things that God has in stored for each of us.

God is speaking to us, God is teaching us. Don't miss it. Don't be distracted by the world, all of its noise, all of the ways that it gets us to look to every other place for answers for peace for security look everywhere else but God. God is teaching.

So what have you learned from covid? What has God been teaching you?

One of the places I visited was Chicago, yeah it was cold. I zoomed in and taught our confirmation class. It was really great, the kids, it's such a great class.

All of them made casseroles for the soup kitchen at st. johns at home. I think they had fun while they were learning. The topic of the class was and I believe, whole heartly, that lesson not only the confirmands needed to hear but that we all need to be learning and practicing.

The class was called, love god, love your neighbor. I mean isn't this it? Over the last couple of years in one way or another we've had everything broke down, close down, wiped down...with antibacterial, taken away. But this is God's message, that no matter what we all may be going through. No matter how tough it is. Love God, with all your heart, soul and mind and Love your neighbor, as yourself.

As I look around the world it seems as though we are struggling with this. I cant go online without reading something about how the church is dying or wont recover from the pandemic. Younger people don't want to go to church, older people cant go to church.

But are we loving God, with all of our hearts. Despite what we might be hearing and seeing. Faith matters, why? Because it can feel like an uphill battle to keep that love alive. And to keep love alive we are going to have to keep pushing, and to keep pressing forward.

Are we loving our neighbors as ourselves?

I ask this not in the general sense but are you, loving others, are you looking out for others, are you supporting others, offering other grace and compassion?

Week after week we come here to this place, to model for the rest of our week how we should move in the world. We are fed at that table, we say thank you to God, so that we can go out into the world to feed others, to love others. We come here not to complete the work that God asks of us, but only as a reminder to Go out into the world to Love God, and to love others.

Paul in our epistle reading can help us as we are thinking about how we love. He says, Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Are we loving God like this, are we loving our neighbor like this?

The world needs more love in it. I know you know that's the truth. It starts with you, with all of us. We need to be the ones to show others. Why? Because we know that this is what God asks of us. Week after week we read scripture and hear messages, but at the core of so much of it all is that God loves you, so take that Love and give it back to God and Give it to others.

So I want to encourage you, to think about what Paul says about love. Its patience, its kindness, all of it. I want you to practice one part of it today, and then tomorrow I want you to practice another part of what it means to love.

The world needs our love, so let's get after it.

Amen.