

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LOVE CROSSES THE STREET?

Thursday: One Faith – Morning Worship, September 1
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Often when I speak to groups that have never met me before I know there's a question on your heart from the moment you lay eyes on me. And the question is, as a matter of fact just look to your right and to your left, and ask the person next to you because you've been wanting to do this, ask them what is that under his chin? Alright, yeah. What is that? I have to tell you about that later. But I do love you and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it so don't even try. We're going to be talking for a few minutes and I can tell you right now it's going to be challenging as you can imagine a guy with a beard like mine is challenging, right? But I have a passage of scripture I'd like to share with you. Found in Luke chapter 10 verse 25 and it reads:

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down the road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And this young lawyer said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

I'm going to talk for a few minutes on what happens when love crosses the street. You know I've had quite a journey. That's a beautiful mug isn't it? You can imagine this kid was disruptive. This kid is still disruptive right? But from as early as I can remember, I had questions. I wondered why is the world like it is? And where is the justice? And why do I have to drink from that other fountain? I drank from a separate water fountain until I was 12 years old right here in Houston, Texas. And I never understood why I had to drink from another fountain and as fearful as my mother would get when I got close to that other fountain. I always told myself, there must be something really powerful in that water coming from that other fountain. So every now and then when no one was looking, I snuck me a drink from that other fountain. That's right yeah. I grew up in a world with two fountains, with two doors. A door for one group of people in the front and a door for another group of people in the rear. And I never understood why I had to go through another door. I never understood why I had to sit at the back of the bus. But there was one place, one place where I always found equality and that was the Houston Zoo. You are waiting for me to say I found equality at church. I found equality at the Houston Zoo because in the

middle of the Houston Zoo there was this fountain - the Lion Head Fountain. And I had my mother take me to the zoo as often as I could get her to take me there. Because there was something about that zoo that had that fountain. And I tell you what the one thing I love about that zoo, it was that it only had one fountain. And I would line up, for my drink from that fountain and I stand there where all the other kids with every hue imaginable would line up with me and I would say, "now this is what justice looks like." Eight years old. And I was always challenged. challenged by why could the zoo get it right but the church... The zoo got it right. But I would get back to the church and the church lacked power to change my circumstances. So as soon as I could, I walked away. And I stayed away from the church as long as I could. Until I met Juanita. When we married it was understood, that whether I believed or not I was going to church. But I've often wondered, for my eight-year-old self, 52 more years later, my 60 year old self, I'm wondering in 52 years couldn't the church have done something to make some changes? Because even though that other water fountain isn't visible. That other water fountain is still here. And it may not be a water fountain - but, how about opportunity? So when I think about the fact that there is a lot going on, I have to remind myself that our product is love. And when I think about our product being love, I often wonder how do we get to where we are right now. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 asked the question, where do we go from here? Chaos or Community? And today I ask the question, where do we go from here, church? Unity or uniformity? One of my mentors, my civil rights mentors, Dr. Virgil Wood, marched with Dr. King. Wave your hand Dr. Wood. Yes, sir. Yeah, show some love. Yeah, great man. So I've been reading a book. The book is entitled "Bold" written by Steven Kotler. Steven Kotler talks about companies and experiences, often missed opportunities and the impact of missing opportunities on those companies and the communities around them. One of the companies that Steven Carter profiles is the Eastman Kodak Company and he talks about how in 1996 that the Eastman Kodak Company controlled literally a monopoly in the film industry - 140 thousand employees and a 28 billion dollar market cap. Kodak controlled 90% of the film market and 85% of the of the camera market. But somewhere along the way the Kodak Company had forgotten that their product was never film and camera. Their product had always been capturing memories, "Kodak Moments." And one day without warning, this conglomerate began to experience six factors that Kotter talks about in his book, and those factors were exponential change that took place in that company before the executives could respond. Kotler outlines these shifts that occurred. The first was digitalization. And often we think that digitalization has to do with technology but digitalization is what happens when culture makes a cumulative progress with the sharing of ideas. My brothers and sisters on the continent of Africa have obviously figured out digitalization, with 5 million United Methodists. So along the way we know that in the midst of this cumulative process of sharing ideas, once it begins, it doesn't stop and we must ask ourselves have we forgotten an opportunity? We got to think that in the midst of this we know that once digitalization occurs deception sets in and deception is what happens when exponential change goes unnoticed. And exponential change, family, is happening right now. While we're sitting in this room changes are taking place. And when we think about changes are taking place, we are forgetting the fact that there are 80 million millennials who are not represented in this room today. And think about this, 80 million in the U.S., 1.7 billion globally, 75% of the workforce by 2025 will be the group right now that we are ignoring. And once this deception takes place, ultimately disruption follows, and when we think about disruption follo'wing, that is any change that creates a new market. And we have to ask the question what is the new market for the church. What is going to replace us if we don't respond effectively to these changes. If we go to sleep we're gonna to wake up one morning just like the taxi industry in America. Went to sleep one night, woke up...Uber, Lyft had replaced them. Music executives went to sleep one night... Spotify, Pandora, giving their music away. Rental car companies...Blue-indy. Think about it, Bell Telephone System employees they thought they had a lock on the telephone. There was a telephone in every home in America and they woke up one morning and everyone had a cell phone in their pocket. My 85-year-old

mother doesn't have a landline anymore. She said 'baby I don't need a landline I got a cell phone!' What? And before they knew it 7 billion people had those little devices with a million dollars' worth of technology in 6 square inches. And we still think it is in the hymnal. Where's the hymnal? Where's the hymnal? Where is the hymnal? While our Millennial counterparts pull out their devices and say oh it's right here. And once that occurs, demonetization, and everyone knows what demonetization is, that's when the money goes. Skype demonetized long distance service, alright? Craigslist demonetized classified advertising. Napster demonetized the music industry. And departure is demonetizing the church. So when we think about how we are to respond we realize that there are three additional factors that are taking place in the midst of this. Also when the money gets tight. and the money goes away, demonetization occurs. And we know what happens when demonetization occurs, the goods and services themselves begin to disappear. And imagine this. The smartphone finished up what the digital camera began to do with the Eastman Kodak Company.

And imagine this, 57 billion pictures were taken annually by 1990 and today 600 billion pictures plus are taken every year. And dematerialization occurs. And dematerialization occurs every time a church closes and a person writes the churches off as culturally irrelevant. And every time the church is perceived as an institutionally obsolete institution. And we think about the fact that the core of dematerialization is centered around the words, schisms and splits. Get quiet. It's okay. It's okay. You see, that's dematerialization at its worst.

And I wish John Wesley was in the midst of us right now. Asking the questions. So splitting for what? I remember the last time the church wanted to split it was because of slavery. The last time and that was a schism, if I remember correctly. But for some reason the church decided to come together. Because there was something more important than our agendas. The word is Jesus. Thank all five of you for clapping. I appreciate that. And democratization of course is what happens when the people who are the beneficiaries of the experience take charge. St. Patterson, St. Peter's Square 2005 - St. Peter square 2013. By 2005 a few folks had a few devices snapping, snapping. By 2013 everybody had it. Think about the church. And where are we in the midst of this. Kodak forgot it was in the business of capturing memories. Just like the church too often forgets its product is love and democratization is gradually removing the power from the institution controlling love.

My question for you this morning is where is love creating disruption in your part of the world? And love should be creating disruption in your part of the world and if it's not, we're going to talk some more. And as we hold both unity and uniformity in tension this morning, in the Wesleyan tradition, the Wesleyan tradition does have something to say in relation to love. Two hundred eighty years ago, February 20th, 1736, John Wesley preached a sermon. Sermon number 139 in Savannah and the sermon title was simply "On Love." I want you to look that one up. Plant it in your hearts. I carry this sermon, "On Love", with me everywhere I go to remind myself why I am Wesleyan. John Wesley opened his Bible to 1st Corinthians, 13th chapter and only read the third verse. "And though I give, and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, if I don't have love, it profits me nothing." Then Wesley started preaching and y'all know Wesley could preach all day. I only have 30 minutes. But he said some of y'all are not serious enough. And some of you won't really believe it. And some of you will think it's too hard to sing and some of you will forget it as soon as you can. And some of you, of course not the clergy in the room, because you lack humility, alright, will fall away rather than to suffer for it. We know what suffering means. But too often we are not willing to suffer. John Wesley and when we think about like a frame for John Wesley's position on love, love always ruled as the ultimate theological and ethical category. Love. So fellow Wesleyans unless love informs your

theology the arms of your god really won't be large enough to embrace the complexity and diversity in this big world of ours. And unless love informs your ecclesiology that peephole on your door and those secret words that a person has to utter to get entrance to your church will no longer. And unless love informs your eschatology there won't be enough time.

I was in Cape Town South Africa a few months ago and a good friend of mine Jonathan Jansen said: "Hey Rudy, you know love is a waste of time." I said, "what?" He said, "Yeah in order to love you have to be willing to waste some time." So, often we are not willing to waste that time. You know Jesus had some contempt for the religious establishment and often I have the same contempt, for similar reasons. Matthew chapter 6 talks about it. You know what Jesus said in Matthew Chapter 6? He said, "Man, you have really nice robes and you can recite a prayer better than anybody out here. But you're kinda like a hypocrite." You know we go to the root meaning of that word and it really means actor. Are we acting or are we really meaning what we tell people, when we tell them this institution is about love. Do we really? You know, think about this, I realize for the same reason I was constantly negotiating my version of contempt for religion, in the midst of that 1985 when my wife took me to church, I walked into a Methodist Church. I met this engaging young Pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell and it was Windsor Village United Methodist Church. I walked in the church as an unbeliever. I sat in the pew for 5 years as an unbeliever. But you know what has happened in my second week of my church, that pastor came up to me and he introduced himself to me. He said, "Kirbyjon." You know that Kirbyjon is 6 foot, I'm 5'6" Alright now, Kirbyjon. I said, "Hey, you're the pastor." And from that moment forward, I didn't realize it but Kirbyjon started to disciple me. And ultimately I became a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Jesus. In the midst of that I not only joined that church, I became a Christian. It was all because of the love I felt, not only from him the leader of that institution, but from all the people around me on the pews. Those folk loved me into this relationship with Christ. You know I think about that and I'm reminded of 31 years ago when I walked into that church, and five-years later, 26 years ago when I offered my life to Jesus, and 2 years later followed Jesus into service, I'm reminded of that moment that it wasn't the church's doctrine or the church's polity that just drew me into that place, alright? I couldn't care less for what the Book of Discipline said in that moment. What I really wanted to know was, do you love me? Do you love me? That's what the world is asking us today church. Do you love me? Do you love me? That's what people want to know. Do you love me? They don't care about your legislation. They don't care about your budgets. As a matter of fact, most folk in the streets don't think churches should have budgets anyway. People are in peril all over the world. Something I learned a long time ago was: "Whenever you see a fight, follow the money!" See who's going to win and who's going to lose. Money... As a result of that fight I gave up money when I walked into this church. Money was a god for me. My entire life till I was 36 years old. I know what it means to worship money. It's never a good end. Along the way, I know that not only do people want to know that you love them, they want to know what is your definition of love. This is my definition of love: It allows a person to be who they choose to be, for themselves without any assistance, that they meet my expectations. See, if I can love a person and not have a premeditated agenda, then I'm loving.

What does that have to do with this scripture this morning? Jesus tells this story to this young lawyer. The lawyer questions him and says: "Hey, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" You know, that lawyer was a scholar. He knew. But he wanted to know what was Jesus's frame of reference around 613 or so statutes, that govern Jewish life. "So how do you, Jesus interpret this?" Instead of offering a traditional response from one of those 613 codes, Jesus responds, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your strength and all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." But the young lawyer wanted to find a loophole said, "Rabbi, who is my neighbor?" It was like Jesus put his Torah down. I'm thinking at the moment, oh he's gonna slap him. That's what's going to happen next. He

is gonna slap him. But instead of slapping him, he said, “you know there was a man. There was a man. I’ll tell you about this man. He was going down a dangerous road. Yeah, got attacked by some desperate people who were living in a disconnected **community. And if these conditions weren't bad enough, the church was distracted. Desperate man, dangerous road, detached community, distracted church.**” Jesus tells the story of how all the religious professionals just walked by this guy. “But this one Samaritan,” Jesus said, “just stopped, crossed over and showed compassion.” So I'm thinking, okay Jesus, you talk about this Samaritan showing compassion and I know in that moment. There was something happening, there was something happening in the moment, you know what was happening at the moment? What was happening in that moment is, life is always interpreted through an inherited narrative. Life is always interpreted through an inherited narrative. Everything that we ultimately do in life is because someone told us that's how we do it. This is what we identify as beauty. This is how we identify intelligence, all right? This is who we are afraid of. And this is how we love and this is how we determined fear of those people. This is how we embrace people. And it is always an inherited narrative, whenever we look at it. When we think about that we realize that there's more at stake here than just an inherited narrative.

Richard Beck in his book “Unclean” talks about religious systems that often function on institutionalized social moral disgust. Institutionalized social moral disgust. And in this book he talks about the psychology of oral incorporation. The psychology of oral incorporation is the psychology that determines what we put in our mouths as clean and what we put in our mouths as unclean. Let me tell you something, I've been all around the world and I have put my feet under the table in Calcutta. I have put my feet under the table all over the continent of Africa and I'm telling you I didn't recognize everything that was put in front of me, alright? But I tell you what, the folk that were putting it in front of me trusted it and I trusted them and we ate and I loved it. But I realized there was more at stake here than just me eating something in that moment. I was demonstrating what I identify as acceptance. And you know, along the way we also know that people, groups can consciously or subconsciously be viewed as sources of contamination out of the same psychology. The untouchables in parts of India. What I've come to realize as I wrap up that disgust, is a well-engineered boundary psychology. Somewhere along the way those invisible forces tell us what is clean and what is unclean. Who are those people that we just don't get on with. Instead of answering that question directly, Jesus talked about this place where we find ourselves today. One of my favorite authors Anne Lamott said, “You can safely assume that you created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates the same people you do.” Defenseless victims. Who are they in our community? Desperate people. Who are they in our community? Who are the disconnected communities? Is the church too distracted? Rabbi David Hartman said, “an Orthodoxy that denies personhood commits spiritual suicide.” As I take my seat today, I just want to leave you with a thought. And the thought is, Jesus identified the most unlikely person to be the hero of the narrative. And along the way we realize that when love crossed the street, something happened. I want you to know that every time love crosses the street, something happens. I don't know about you, but I'm a product of love one day crossing the street, alright? As a matter of fact, Juanita crossed the street with me one day, alright? Love crossed the street and a paralyzed man got up from his mat. Love crossed the street and stopped a funeral procession in the city and a boy got out alive. When love crossed the street, Peter's mother-in-law got well. When love crossed the street, a man with the withered hand got well. When love crossed the street, a blind man regained his sight. When love crossed the street, a crazy man in a graveyard in Gadara, when he was found later, was clothed and in his right mind. When love crosses the street something can happen in our world and I think the world is waiting for love to cross the street. That's what I believe. I believe love is saying I'm down right now will you cross the street to see about me.

I'm finished now but I gotta tell you, that's my Baptist close. I'm almost finished. I'm almost finished. These 6 lines are important. My Aunt Maymay she was 4 foot 1. She was a cross between Mother Teresa and Al Capone. She ran a little grocery store in the neighborhood and people ate because that grocery store was there. And every time somebody crossed the street and came in to my Aunt Maymay's grocery store, if they had money or not they ate, alright? They ate. And I want to tell you I learned something at her feet. I worked in that store from the time I was 6 years old until I left town. I'm gonna tell you something, from my Aunty Maymay, she taught me the significance of these 6 lines right here. Juanita and I lived with her the last year of her life, she was passing. Cancer had taken over her. We would sit and talk with her every night. She was my symbol of Christianity, even though I didn't have nothing to do with it. One night we were talking. She said, "Baby I'm planning my funeral right now and I don't want you to let any of those people who haven't told me already that they love me, I don't want you to let any of those people just say anything at my funeral." She actually didn't use those exact words she used some expletives, alright? And some descriptive words that I can't say right now because when in mixed company, if you know what I mean, alright? "But don't let any of those people, alright, say anything about me at my funeral, because if they wanted to say something about me they would have said it already." She said, "Baby, this is how I live. I live my eulogy every day, alright? I live my eulogy every day. I'm not waiting until I die to wait for somebody to stand up and say good something about me." Eulogy, eulogia in Latin..Greek, It's the word that means a blessing and if you want to bless the world around you, start living your eulogy right now. But what I watched my Aunty Maymay do, every day she woke up, she cared about every human interaction. These 6 lines, if you can imagine that when you are dead and you will die one day, the only thing that a person can say are 6 words about your life. What will those word 6 words be?

God bless you. I love you. Cross the street.