

## WHAT DOES YOUR LOVE LOOK LIKE?

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### Friday: One People – Morning Worship, September 2 Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie

Conference Video: <http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/wmc2016-videos/WMC16-FriAM-McKenzie.mp4>

Let the church say amen and let the church say amen again. It is a privilege and honor to be extended an invitation to share at the World Methodist Council and I thank the president and the officers, those of you who were responsible for this to happen. To all of the delegates and members who have gathered from all the four corners of the world, we trust that the Lord has already blessed you and will continue to bless you through our deliberations. We praise God for Supervisor Stan McKenzie my partner in life and ministry who was with us today. Supervisor Davis as well. To the Bishops of the Church, our president of the council. Bishop White, Bishop Young, our senior Bishop. To all of the pastors and presiding elders and people of the 10th Episcopal District. Hey y'all. We praise God for your presence today as well as your prayer and support.

Let us pray. Do it. Amen.

Our text this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark second chapter verses 1 to 11 is the context of our sharing. Now I can read all 11 verses or you can look at it on the screen and seeing that I only have 30 minutes somebody say amen. I will simply lift two parts from verses 1 to 11. Verse 5 "And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." and then down to the end "this amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!" so when Jesus saw, this amazed everyone and our theme and thought of meditation this morning is what does your love look like.

In the heat of the night in Charleston, S.C. 9 people were killed in the sacred sanctuary of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. They were not selling single cigarettes on the corner. They were not playing music too loud in a parking lot, they were not playing with a toy gun in a park but they were in church. A church with a long history entwined with the city and state and national struggle with racial equality from enslavement through the civil war, Jim Crow, separate but equal, and the civil rights movement. The victims were gathered in church praying and studying the Bible and they welcomed the young stranger into their midst and Dyllan sat among the church members for an hour before he began to vent against African Americans and he took out a 45-caliber glock handgun and massacred 9 people including the pastor The Rev. Clementa Pinckney, who was also a State Senator. The husband and father was slain along with the ministerial staff and church members. And the gunman left 6 women and 3 men ranging in age from 26 to 87 dead or dying on the floor. As shots were fired, Pinckney's wife and daughter hid under his desk in a nearby office and another woman and child played dead on the floor and then the gunman took his gun and pointed one more time in the direction of a woman and then said "I will leave you alive to tell the story." And there were so many bullet holes in the lower sanctuary that it will never be the same again. The tragedy broke our hearts but it did not break our spirit. Myra Thompson had received her license to preach that night just before she died in a hail of bullets. And when the accused murderer was arraigned, her husband, the Rev. Anthony Thompson, told Dylann Roof, "we forgive you."

A 20th century prophet said "unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final say," that's what love looks like. So the question on the table now is, what does your love look like. South Carolina

Governor Nikki R. Haley said that parents now have to explain to their kids how they can go to church and be safe. President Barack Obama said not to just ask who did the killing but also question the system and the way of life and the philosophy which produces such murderers. We cannot make sense of what has happened said the Rev. George Feldon Jr. pastor of New Hope AME Church, but we can come together. What does your love look like?

Four-year-old Sydney Meyer Skunniver cut off her long hair to provide wigs for children who are sick. What does your love look like? A young girl, 4-year-old Javia Jones was saved from drowning when Michael Patterson jumped into a Georgia Creek to save her. He didn't have to, but he did. Javia was saved but Michael suffered a serious spinal injury and is paralyzed now from the shoulder down. What does your love look like? On an extreme cold winter day, New York police detector brought a pair of thermal socks and a pair of boots for a homeless man. What does your love look like? An 82-year-old barber by the name of Anthony Symeries goes to a Hartford, Connecticut park every Wednesday with his barber chair and clippers and he gives haircuts to the homeless and only charges a hug. What does your love look like? While Jason Loose was visiting in China he sat down next to a homeless woman and shared his french fries. What does your love look like? In 1793 the city of Philadelphia suffered the worst yellow fever epidemic known in North America. Nearly 5,000 people perished including 500 African Americans. And Richard Allen was asked by Benjamin Ross, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence to lead the effort to recruit Black volunteers to help the sick at the risk of their own lives. And they cared for those who were ill. They cooked, they cleaned and carried out the dead. What does your love look like?

In the Bible Abigail gave David sustenance after Nabal refused. David gave Jonathan's son Mephibosheth a seat at the table in spite of the demise of Saul. Barnabas interceded for Saul, now Paul so he could fellowship with the disciples in Jerusalem. Barnabas interceded for John Mark to go on a second Missionary journey as a helper after he messed up on the first one. What does your love look like? The Samaritan now called good, helped the man victimized by the side of the road with resources out of his own budget. Four men interrupted their personal agenda to get a paraplegic to Jesus in our text. This same Jesus who healed the paralytic instructs us to love God, neighbor a self, love your enemy and pray for those who are unkind because the love of God will change your mind about people and change your mind about God. What does your love look like?

When asked, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, or in prison, Jesus responded, as you have done it to the least of these you have also done it to me. A New Testament epistle said that the best way to show that we have God's love in our heart is to share with what we have with those who are in need. What does your love look like? Jesus' love looks like this. For Jesus demonstrated His love for us while we were yet sinners. While we were yet the enemies of God, while God was not on our mind. While we were the ones who didn't deserve a rescue mission and still don't. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, God's love poured out in our direction reminiscent of a consistent invitation issued through the vicissitudes of time.

What is that invitation? Come, eat, even though your sins are scarlet I will wash them whiter than snow. Come all who are thirsty, come and drink, those of you who have no money, come buy and drink. Come to all of you who are tired and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Come and see the works of God, come and those who come to me I will not cast out. Come. I came not to call the righteous but I came to call sinners to repentance. This is neither theory, myth, nor legend. God demonstrated this love through his son Jesus on the cross for humankind because God's love will change your mind about people and change your mind about God.

Who would give up his or her life for someone who does not deserve it? Yet Jesus did and yet there is no human parallel for what Jesus did for us, from the cross to the grave and back up again. For greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. That's what Jesus' love looks like so what does your love look like? The resurrection is God's opening the front door of the kingdom and waving His hand, come on in come on in. And who can come? Whoever wishes! That means is not up to you. You do not determine who comes. But whoever wants to come, the Bible says, whosoever will, and this is your praise God moment because you are a part of the whosoever will. You don't have to pledge to get in. You don't have to have special language. You don't have to have insider knowledge, there is no required income level. There is no particular social or political status to get in. There is no education level to get in. There is no achievement level or attaining personal perfection, it is the whosoever will. Anybody can come. Turn to your neighbor on the right and on the left and say, "that means you!" It means you, you ain't got nothing to do with it. Paul writes, whosoever calls the name of Jesus can come and be saved for there is no other name under heaven by which you can be saved.

Come. And when we come, we're not just coming for tangible objects. We're not coming to get a new car, a new house, a new job, a better paycheck. We're not coming for stuff. But we come to experience the peace and joy that comes from God's presence, a rich transformative emotion into the salvific Holy Spirit, experience that is cleansing, forgiving, renewing and saving.

Can I exegete the text now? In our text, we find a community coming, shall we say, to the historic annual conference in Capernaum. That was apparently the headquarters for the preaching ministry of Jesus. It was a community wrestling with this young Nazarene upstart who was preaching a rhema word, the revealed knowledge of God offering a vision of the kingdom. And whenever there is a revelation of truth there are those who will view the truth with suspicion. It may be called false and some may even be denied as truth and then it becomes untruth until proof. And we all know it is easy to say something when you don't have to prove the something that you said. Or preach what you don't have to demonstrate. All that this community knew was that he was Joseph and Mary's firstborn. Ain't he the carpenter's son? They thought they knew him all too well. Jesus was barely 30 years old at the time and some in the crowd remembered him as a boy, they knew his parents, they watched him grow up.

And then he went down to that baptizing prophet down the river and he comes back exercising authority over demons, diseases and death. They thought they knew him. Much in the same way, people thought they knew you. They thought they knew you. When you were converted, they thought they knew you. When you first started preaching and pastoring and teaching, weren't they over, didn't they, uh-huh, and then they thought they knew you. Until God changed your mind about people and God with love. When God calls you to step outside familiar territory and elevates you, there will be a whole crowd of people who won't believe the truth in you until there is proof.

In Mark Chapter 2 we are now entering what biblical scholars refer to as the introduction of the conflict narratives, reports of conflict between Jesus and Jewish authorities. Now there is always conflict when there are drastic differences of opinion, y'all can say amen now. Here is the first conflict. In one corner there are those who thought they knew who Jesus was and in the other corner is who Jesus really is representing a new reality emerging being played out in front of them. The love of God through Jesus Christ transforms the understanding of God's power and people's relationship with God. Those who are defined by culture and society as outside of God's love and grace. In other words, they weren't church material. All of a sudden they were included and that represented a new reality. You missed your praise God moment.

When God begins to shift normal, and regular and ordinary and business as usual into a new reality there will always be conflict between what was and what is going on. Conflicts between what

people think they know and what really is. Conflict between the natural and the supernatural and the invisible and the visible. Conflicts between the move of God and the slow pace of congregational life. Excuse me. Mark tells us that Jesus' popularity was on the rise and great crowds followed Him wherever He went. The social media of ancient times had gotten the word out about a spiritual tweet up with Jesus in town. And the crowd showed up. The sanctuary was full and there was no room in the house where Jesus was preaching not even around the doors and the windows which is a very good problem to have. A group of concerned citizens of the community however, started a new initiative outside of the walls of the house. They began a selfless mission as opposed to a selfish one which really is a hard thing to do. They focused on one, whom they believed could be more than he was at that moment and Mark writes that these four men began to work together as one. They were able to look beyond the obvious problem and pain of the man incapacitated on a bed of affliction and work together as one. Together they picked them up. They arrived at the house where Jesus was preaching. The people were engaged in worship oblivious to what was happening on the outside. Sometimes we can be so busy doing church, that we forget that there are people outside. People on the street. People outside of the doors of the church or people that are simply left out and everybody showed up to hear the preaching everybody enjoyed the position that they had in the house. I got my seat you better go ahead and get yours. I got in. You're gonna have to deal with getting in for yourself. But someone was left on the outside and here we find an extraordinary effort on the part of four people acting as one. Trying hard to get into the church where Jesus was preaching and they saw themselves as a catalyst for change and acted to bring positive change to the paralytic. They had to believe that whatever the brother was going through, whatever his condition, whatever happened, whatever is happening that Jesus could do something about it. That the man was more than the sum total of his pain, his problem or his condition. Praise God for people who can see you beyond your pain, your problem and your condition. Praise God for people who look beyond our condition to see our potential and believe in a better day and a better life for us. Praise God for people who can see beyond who you are right now, to see who you can be in Jesus Christ. To look beyond where you are right now to where you can be in Jesus Christ. To look beyond what you are now to where you can be. Praise God for people who can see the potential in us, identify our hidden strengths, see the gifts lying dormant and encourage us to stir up the gift within us, who can see skills waiting to behold, see the good in us although we're covered in the muck and the mire of mistakes and poor decisions. See our best and not be afraid of the best in us. Who will see the best in us and will not try to destroy the best of us or control the best in us or clone or deny the best in us. See us and not be swayed by our mistakes. See the best in us that we haven't even seen in ourselves.

It wasn't easy to see something in this man. Someone who had been incapacitated, unable to function as a decision making, productive member of the community. Someone who was perhaps a drain on the budget and certainly did not deserve another rescue effort. His life was oriented around his condition, his fate was obvious, his future was expected. He was who he was and there was no more hope for him. He was paralyzed, he was stuck he was frozen, he was stuck in a disabling condition he couldn't do what was necessary to care for himself or anyone else. This was not the first person who was traumatized by a pre-existing condition nor will he be the last. There just may be someone here today. You don't have to look around, who says, I understand the place of this man. I can identify with a consistent condition that refuses to change. This is what their love looked like. The four man took action.

Love after all is an action verb, is not a being verb but one that moves, works and demonstrates itself in real tangible ways. Isn't that a visible representation of 1 Corinthians 13 that love cares more, doesn't

strike, doesn't force itself, it's not puffed up, doesn't fly off at the handle doesn't keep score of other's sin, it is a love that doesn't put up with everything, always looking for the best in others without looking back and does not fail. Just like salvation doesn't exempt you from test, trials and tribulations, demonstrating the love of God doesn't mean it will be easy.

The people got in the way. The building got in the way. The load they were carrying was a barrier. But guess what, God will not move the barriers in front of us but will give us the power and the strength to conquer the barriers. The four men got him to Jesus, you know the story. They had to do it in an extraordinary manner and an extraordinary effort and after conflict with those in the crowd who needed proof of the truth of God's power through Jesus Christ the Lord gave the man instruction to take up his bed and go. He did. He carried out the bed that he came in on. But first Jesus forgave him of his sins, he made an accurate diagnosis of his condition.

Last year a man went to a Dallas emergency room with flu like symptoms and he told a nurse that he had recently returned from Liberia. And he was sent home with antibiotics. Two days later his condition worsened and the same man who was sent home was readmitted and after proper testing he was diagnosed with the ebola virus. And he was placed in isolation in critical condition fighting for his life and he later died. The right diagnosis initially could have saved his life. The right diagnosis can mean the difference between life and death. And Jesus speaks a right now word, the revealed word of God, a rhema word properly diagnosing the man's condition. Verse 5, when he sees, Jesus sees the faith of the four men, he forgives the man of his sin. Son, your sins are forgiven. Wait now, he was immobilized, why not just heal his body? That's going home with antibiotics. And when his spiritual condition worsens he will be back. Your sins are forgiven is the appropriate remedy for body, mind, and soul. Not just a difference between life and death but a difference between eternal life and eternal death. It is a truth that produces proof that produces fruit, it was proof of the truth. And Jesus says, now take up your stuff and go on, and this amazed everybody and they praised God saying, we have never seen anything like this.

I don't know what you're praying for in this moment but I am praying for a church where people will say we have never seen anything like this before. I'm praying for faith communities of saving faith that produces results we have never seen before. Oh, for a church we have never seen before, a place where God moves and by the power of God, healing and deliverance and salvation. And others will say, we ain't never seen anything like this before. Oh, for a church, we have never seen where the power of the Holy Spirit moves from back to front and from side to side. And we're not worried about our paycheck or a bathroom break or a time or what we gotta do next week or next year because we are in the presence of the Lord. Oh, for a church we've never seen before.

Sit down. I'm almost done. The man became the living testimony of the power of God. Walking out under his own physical power. He was a recipient of God's grace. Who him? Yes! And the people in the crowd were changed by what happened to somebody else. Wait, wait, wait, wait! The people in the crowd were changed by what happened to someone else. It didn't happen to them. It happened to the man and because it happened to the man, ha, it changed their mind about people and changed their mind about God. Don't you love it? Don't you love it? Don't you love it? The people in the crowd were changed, the result as Caroline Field Steward writes, it was an elevation of people's self-esteem through God's redemptive possibilities and an increase in those who will become active witnesses and agents of transformation back in their own communities. Ain't that what we want to happen here? That someone will be changed and transformed by the power of God and we who are gathered in this crowd will now go home and become change agents and witnesses of the transformative power of God? No, y'all not there yet. Give me two more minutes.

What does your love look like? Is this not the work of the church? Yes. You may be carried in but you'll walk out in the power of God. This is the work of the church. The light of God shining through you. The same light that parted the red sea. The same light that slayed the lion, the bear, and the giant. The same light that shined on Elijah as he faced the 400 prophets of Baal. The same light that soak Job's soul until he came forth as pure gold. The same light that shone in the darkness of the belly of the whale. The same guiding light that shines in you. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. What does your love look like? Let it be a love that serves God inside out. It's a love that serves God just as much outside of here as it does inside of here. This was not a programmatic thrust of the ministry. But it was for people who acted as one that was doing the ministry outside of the church. It wasn't a dictator of the steward board, it wasn't a project of the trustees, it wasn't a page out of the discipline it wasn't an item of the pastor parish committee. There was no church conference to affirm it, there was no official board to give a resolution. There was no quarterly conference, just four people who acted as one! Who acted as one. Who saw the problem and they worked on it. They were not working on each other, they were not dredging up the past or what happened yesterday, they were just doing good. That's what their love looked like. And our love ought to be seen and heard not just on Sunday morning in the church, but our love ought to be seen down at the board of education, and in City Hall, and in the prison system, and in the governor's mansion, and in the White House, and in civic and business and community arenas. Jesus was seen and heard not just in the temple but he was seen and heard in the plain, the shore, the boat, in big cities, mountain tops, and small towns. And just like Jesus, we've gotta get out of the house. We've got to be seen and heard demonstrating the love of God. In real and tangible ways. It is a love that builds community among neighbors and strangers creating space that allows for a divine connection, love making room for those who are seeking a relationship with God in a manner that helps them make sense of their reality.

Let it be a love that is unafraid to try new approaches to ministry. I knew it was gonna be quiet at this moment, I knew! Take a deep breath, come on breath with me. Let it be a love that is unafraid to try new approaches to ministry. They tried the door, they tried the window, eventually, they went to the roof. They had to break the thatch of the roof to get to Jesus. They had no roof removal degrees. There is no evidence that they had roof removal books in their library or tapes. There is no evidence in the text they went to a roof removal conference or attended any TED Talks on roof removal. The text doesn't indicate that roof removal was an ordinary occurrence. It was unheard of. So roof removal was not in the book of rules and regulations, but they were willing to try something new to get the man to Jesus. And so must we! We are beyond the season of business as usual when usual ain't working no more. So why do we insist on doing what is usual when usual is not working any more. The church is no longer on the radar screen of those who were born in the 1990s and many churches are overwhelmed with trying to stay in touch and keep up with shifting cultures. We ought to be beyond the season of blaming others. We ought to be beyond the season of waiting for a sudden reversal so we can all go back to 1947. Maybe, just maybe it's time to do more than just to open the doors of the church, maybe it's time to raise the roof and get out of the house. Maybe, just maybe it's time to break up the thatch and hollow ground to ritual and tradition. Maybe, just maybe it's time to reach beyond our comfort zones of worship, that means worshipping the way we want it and instead of worship the way God's wants it. Maybe, just maybe, we oughta widen our circle of concern to include those who are not part of our status quo, who do not look like us, live where we live, shop where we shop, wear what we wear, drive what we wear. If God can include everybody, what gives you the right to sit in judgement and exclude anybody. Maybe, just maybe we need to serve beyond one particular place, one worship, one time, in one way but rethinking how we share the gospel in spaces and ways that are safe.

What does your love look like? I've been asking this question ain't none y'all answered it yet. Let it be a love that never gives up. It's a love that will never let us give up trying to get people to Jesus, no matter how hard it is. These four men stretched their capabilities. They pushed beyond human and natural barriers, people building in a structure that kept other people out. They kept trying and didn't give up. Our love of God ought to compel us to do the same. We love with the love of God. And when it gets rough, we abide in the love of God. And when the pathway is not easy or accessible, we abide in the love of God. Because the love of God does not guarantee that there will not be difficult times in our lives, but it does promise to abide with us and in us. God's love abides helping us through those times. The love of God does not eliminate the need for painful decisions but it does help when we have to make them. The love of God does not exempt us from hard conversations, but it does promise to abide with us in the midst of those conversations. The love of God does not take away our racing hearts when walls impede our progress or windows close to new opportunities, but promises to abide giving us whatever it is we need to let those words be spoken and action taken. The love of God abides and let it abide with supernatural love of God. We must never give up: by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. Jesus initiates a permanent relationship between his disciples and love. Love is your membership card. Love is your password. Love is the passcode. Love is the id badge. Love is a new command with traditions, one mind, heart, soul and strength, that we love God with everything we got. To love our neighbor. It's the Bible in a nutshell. Love God and love others. But if we will love out of God's love and not our own, our churches would look a whole lot different, and our communities would look a whole lot different. The love of Christ gives us the ability to meet needs. This love makes us generous and ready to share. Because this love changes our mind about people and about God. This love is our public witness. Can people tell by the way you live that you love God? Can people tell by the way you treat your wife, that you love God? Can people tell by how you treat your husband, that you love God? Oh this is a hard crowd, I'll work on you a little while longer. Can we tell by the way you raise your children, that you love God? Can we tell by the way you handle your finances, that you love God? Can we tell by the way you handle your career and the call of God that you love God? Can we tell by the way you treat your neighbor in the meeting that you love God? Can we tell by how you talk about other people that you love God? Can we tell how you treat your pastor, your district superintendent, your presiding elder, your bishop, that you love God? Come on, say yes. Say yes! Say yes! Let the love of God shine through you, in your email, on your faces because the love of God will make you do strange and wonderful things. Because we love God, we will pray for and respect men, women and children regardless of race, creed, color, economic, social condition. Because we love God, we will stop domestic violence, incest and abuse in our own home, in our own churches, in our own countries. Because we love God, we will get tested for HIV and be ethical in our conduct once we find out the test. Because we love God, we will advocate for the poor and the oppressed wherever the poor and the oppressed are. Because we love God, we will stop the abuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco. Come on now. Because we love God, we will oppose human trafficking and protect vulnerable women and children. Because we love God, we will support sustainable economic development, we will be civil with those who do not share our theological or christological beliefs!

Because we love God, we'll act like it every single day of our lives. Don't sit down. Now at this moment we could sing, I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore. Very deeply staying within sinking to rise no more. But the master of the sea heard my despairing cry. From the waters He lifted me, now safe am I. Love lifted me. Love lifted me. When nothing else could help love lifted me. Now, we could sing that song but I'd rather sing this one here. People all over the world, everybody, join hands, start a love train. Love train. People all over the world, everybody, join hands, start a love train. Love train. (Singing).



