

August 8, 2021

Texts: Leviticus 19: 11-18; Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Title: “Walking in the Way of Love”

I have a question for you today: how many steps does it take to walk around the world? Since we aren't Jesus and can't walk on water, I'm not counting oceans and major bodies of water. Well, there's a website that measures things like this and according to their calculation, it takes the average person around 20 million steps to make that walk. Can your Fitbit register 20 million steps? I've never done more than 20,000.

Among the handful of people who have proof that they have completed this walk is Steven Newman, the first person known to walk solo around the world. It took him four years. He wrote a book about it as you can see. He had some amazing experiences along the way.

Now I hate to disagree with those who walk very long distances, but I think the hardest walk anyone will ever take is the walk mentioned in our Bible passage this morning that tells us to “*walk in the way of love,*” in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus to teach them in practical terms how to be the church for the church was a new enterprise never attempted before. It was diverse in every way; rich and poor, slave and free, Jews and Gentiles together, all of them equally loved by God and equally called to walk the walk of love.

Paul pointed them to Jesus' example based on his commandment to love your

neighbor as yourself, two aspects of which I want to emphasize today. **First of all, walking in the way of love requires action, it's an active love.** In Jesus' understanding, *love is a verb*, not a noun. You've heard it said that people watch what we do more than what we say. By choosing to walk in the way of love, we are exercising, you might say, an "unconscious ministry" that can causes others to experience the presence of God.

I read about a famous former high school football coach from Baltimore, Joe Ehrmann, who coached a team that, for a time, was undefeated. Joe's main purpose as a coach was not to win games. It was to teach his players a new definition of masculinity based on "loving relationships and living for a cause greater than yourself."

Coach taught his players the ethic of servant-leadership, putting others' needs before their own. He created a rule that if any of his players saw a student sitting alone in the cafeteria, then that player was required to join the student and eat with him.

Seniors on the team were required to present an essay at the end of the year with the theme, "How I Want to Be Remembered When I Die." Boy, does this world need people like that today!

The Christian message for you and I is based primarily on the life of Jesus. Yes, his words were important but it's how he lived that matters most. He went out into his version of the community of that day and met people where they were. By some estimates, Jesus walked over 3,000 miles during his three years of

ministry. He put his faith into action and literally walked in the way of love, an active love. One more thing: The other aspect I want to hold up today is that **to walk in the way of love requires a sacrificial love.** Verse 5: 2 reads, “. . . walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” A fragrant offering referred to grain, animals or incense that was burned on an altar to honor God. Now the bull or dove that was sacrificed didn’t have a say in the matter but Jesus did.

He knew that he was going to die for the sake of people who hated him, who rejected him, who abandoned him. He chose to be a sacrifice for us to show us just how much God loves us. Friends, that kind of sacrificial love is powerful! And it’s has been changing lives and bringing people to God for over 2,000 years now.

There’s a mission organization in California, called Christian Encounter Ranch. It’s a residential counseling program for young people who come from difficult backgrounds like “drug abuse, abandonment, neglect, and many forms of abuse and trauma.” Through outdoor activities, Bible studies, counseling and caring relationships, many young people find healing from their trauma and a new more hopeful life.

Some years ago, the staff of Christian Encounter Ranch came up with a unique way to raise money for their ministry. They have an annual 24-hour bike ride on the last weekend of July. It consists of twenty-four hours of bike riding through challenging nature trails in the hottest part of the summer months in California.

(90 degrees overnight) They call it “the Agony Ride.” Every year, the Agony Ride raises thousands of dollars for ministries at the Ranch.

A girl named Melissa, a former resident participates in the Agony Ride every year. She says, “I’m amazed that complete strangers who didn’t know me or the other students would put themselves through complete agony, in order to make sure we could experience the healing we needed and could feel the love of Jesus. I ride to show the current students that they’re not alone, that someone cares about their healing, and that they are deeply loved.”

The Executive Director at Christian Encounter Ministries, Nate Boyd, says, “Many of our residents have wrestled their whole lives with a haunting question: does anyone actually care about me? The Agony Ride helps to provide an answer.”

In our passage for today, Paul invites us to walk the Agony Walk—the walk Christ made to the cross in our behalf. We can tell people what they need to do to get their act together but if we walk in the way of love, you won’t have to tell them a lot. They’ll know through love that is both active and sacrificial.

You may not realize it, but we’re surrounded every day by people who are silently asking the question, “Does anyone actually care about me?” And to the extent that we choose to walk in the way of love they’ll get some prime evidence that we care and most important, that God cares. We need it now more than ever. Walk in the way of love! Amen.