

Love Wins

Micah 6:8; 1 John 4:7-12

"How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure that He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure...."

✓ *"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" 1 John 4:9-10*

This is one of John's greatest passages. God is love. Love is His supreme quality. God can only be known by those who live in love. Yet we could not know how, or be able, to love Him if He had not first loved us.

In the midst of all the turmoil in our country we need to remember that whatever happens we are still loved by God. In Him there is victory and that is why I've titled this message "Love Wins"

Once again, we find ourselves invited to the Lord's Table where His love is displayed.

This happens each month, regardless of where we have been, what we have done, what we have left undone, whether we have won great battles or suffered a great defeat. There is an invitation to the table.

On some Communion Sundays, we can reflect back on a great month, a month of blessings and goodness, a month of joy, promotions, financial success, food to eat and clothes to wear, peaceful relationships, well-behaved children, a well-behaved spouse, no arguments, just bliss...and we are invited to the table.

On some Communion Sundays, we can reflect back on a month we rather would forget, a month that has been plagued with death, loss of loved ones, financial struggles, holes in shoes and no money to buy new ones, fights and dissention among family members and friends, relationships perhaps broken beyond repair, sleepless nights and restless days, a month of more questions than answers, a month of change when we needed stability...and we are invited to the table.

Some today have felt the painful sting of death in their families through loss and separation this week. Some today have lost loved one's months or years ago, and that loneliness is still as sharp today as it was on the first day.

This past year, we saw a young man walk into a South Carolina church and open fire, taking the lives of nine of our brothers and sisters. Churches have been burned in the United States and abroad. People have fought about flags and whether the roof of the General Lee is a sign of bigotry and hate. Cities are burning and it seems as if no one wants to get the rioting, the looting the killing and the hate under control. Some people are scared;

some people are celebrating; some people are mad; some people are, unfortunately, indifferent. This is a big deal.

Twenty-one thousand children die each day around the world, many from preventable diseases and unnecessary wars. That's about one child every four seconds, which means since the call to worship today, about 875 children have died. This is a big deal.

There are more than a million abortions a year, approximately 120 per hour, which means since our call to worship today, 60 unborn children have died. This is a big deal.

Seven-hundred thousand people from the United States will be taken and sold in the sex trafficking industry this year. Fifty percent of them will be children, boys and girls, with the average age 11 to 14 years old. Internationally, the total of victims will be somewhere about 3 million people. This is a big deal.

Last year, 41,000 people took their own lives by suicide. That's about 112 people per day. Since our call to worship, about four people have taken their own lives. This is a big deal.

Forty-five million people in the United States live below the poverty line. This is a big deal.

Yet, we are still invited to the Table: an invitation that provides unity, if we will allow it; an invitation that provides peace, if we will allow it; an invitation that offers grace and forgiveness, if we will accept it.

On July 4th, we celebrated the freedom of our nation. Many people celebrated this freedom with fireworks, BBQ and beer. It has been a national holiday to remember our freedom. In this country, it seems we can still do what we want to do and be who we want to be: *one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all*. However, we don't seem to be one nation, especially with all the protests and lawlessness going on. We don't feel as if we can't be divided. In truth, we are a divided people, divided by opinions, beliefs, status, economics, right and wrong, holy and sinful.

Each one of us is a mix of sinner and saint, of struggle and victory, of lost and found, of broken and redeemed. So, there is an invitation to the table.

✓ *Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O Man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you But, to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?"*

God has shown us what is good. In the grandeur of a sunrise, the artistic paintbrush-effect of a sunset, the touch of a loved one,

the tranquility of a sleeping child, food on the table and clothes in the closet...Whether we have much or little, God has shown us what is good. In His perfect goodness, He walked this earth, taught us how to live and love, healed diseases, mended relationships, offered freedom, and gave us life. God showed us goodness through Jesus.

So, there is an invitation to the table, an invitation to seek justice, an invitation to love mercy, an invitation to walk humbly with our God.

I didn't tell you global and national statistics to bring more fear into our lives. I didn't tell you those statistics so we would be filled with doom and gloom. I didn't tell you those statistics so we would have a "Chicken Little" attitude that the sky is falling and the end is near. I told you those so we have the perspective that there is much work to do. I told you those statistics so we understand the workers are few. I told you those statistics so we can begin moving from hearing these statistics as mere numbers and begin seeing these statistics as people, people for whom Jesus came, people for whom Jesus died, people to whom Jesus is calling, just as He called me, just as He called you.

I have seen people proudly display "Love Wins" logos and lawn signs, and I have seen people disgusted by the implication those logos portray. Let me tell you something: Regardless of the sentiment behind the statement, there is no statement truer. Yes, love wins. Yes, love has won.

Love won when Jesus hung on the cross and said, ✓ *"Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do."* Luke 23:34

Love won when Jesus looked at a man on another cross, receiving the judgment and penalty for his actions that he deserved, and said, ✓ *"Assuredly, I say to you, today, you will be with Me in paradise."* Luke 23:43

Love won when, on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead as He had promised so we never would experience death as separation, but so we as His disciples, as His children, could experience everlasting life.

Love won when the gift of the Holy Spirit descended upon early believers on the Day of Pentecost, and that same Spirit is given to dwell in each of us. Love won when we were baptized and sealed by God. Love already had won when Jesus spoke about bread as His body and wine as His blood to be offered in the greatest single act of love in all history. So, yes, love has won.

So, there is an invitation to the table: an invitation to each us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received, to be completely humble and gentle, to be patient, bearing with one another in love, to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, because there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Through this invitation, we can receive the faith, hope and love that is offered; and the greatest of these is love. So, yes, love has won...but not human love; but rather, the lavish and fierce and unrelenting pursuing holy and perfect love of God for each and every one of us, here and everywhere, now and forever.

Love Wins! And here it is displayed for all to see at this table.