



“THE BOLD AND THE BELOVED”
SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 3: 16-24
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
Sunday, April 25, 2021
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

1 John 3:16-24

3:16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

3:17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

3:18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

3:19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him

3:20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

3:21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God;

3:22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

3:23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

3:24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

The Word of the LORD
Thanks be to God.

Video - Bold and Beautiful Clip (1:22)

Are Steffy and Finn going to end up together? Can he overlook that her baby might be Liam's? And what about Hope and Liam--they've been through so much. Including Hope's relationship with Liam's half-brother, Wyatt. And then there was that moment with Thomas. Hope's mom, Brooke, told Thomas he

doesn't have a future with Hope. And Brooke can't seem to figure out whether she wants to be with Ridge or Bill.

Steffy, Finn, Hope, Liam, Thomas, Wyatt, Brooke, Ridge, Bill (act like drawing it all in the air)

Whew! And just like any soap opera worth its salt, no one really trusts anyone else and someone is always getting hurt and someone else is always doing harm.

The Bold and the Beautiful look glamorous and amorous on the outside, but on the inside they are in pretty much constant turmoil and struggling to find love.

If you want to destroy love, then the most powerful weapon you have at your disposal is lies. Create doubt, spread rumors, keep secrets, talk about people instead of directly to people, triangulate.

The Bold and the Beautiful is known for its love triangles--so many criss crossing triangles that it is hard to keep up.

"Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." Sir Walter Scott, 18th century Scottish poet--a story about criss crossed love, deception, and eventually a bunch of broken promises and broken hearts.

Sometimes the bold are not so beautiful when we struggle to trust each other and to lean into our connections. Because what are we being bold for, if not for a purpose that far outstretches our own appetites.

Our passage today from 1 John is, indeed, about being bold--but that boldness comes from God--that boldness is defined by divine love that seeks the liberation and healing of all it touches--not palace intrigue that seeks to deceive and to trap and to have its own way.

The Elder who wrote the Johanne letters was speaking into communities that were getting more complicated as clusters of Jesus followers became more and more removed from anyone who had a first hand experience of Jesus' life on earth. The Elder was looking for markers, for touchstones, for orienting qualities that tell us love is from God and not from some other love like love of possessions or power or wealth or control.

These letters have a timelessness to them even though they were thoroughly located. But the question rings true to us--how do we know love that is true, that is born of God's love, when we see it?

The Elder gives us some markers--and they all come from the life of Jesus:

- He laid down his life for us
- Responded when he saw pain, woundedness, suffering, trauma
- Active and dynamic--not just talk, but manifested in relationships, action, moments in time, deep connection
- Bold calling in when there is injustice, violence, harm
- A clear conscience, a bold heart
- That love is not reserved for the few, but is for the world and every sentient being therein. We love as God loves.

Where do we see that kind of love today? In our lives and in our community? In our church?

There is a profound difference between tangled up web--deceit, secrecy, betrayal, short sightedness, fear, mistrust, resentment.

And the interdependence of a community. Spiders web—has symmetry and intentionality—builds strength and protection and sustainability.

Take a deep breath and pay attention--what do you notice about what makes a web strong?

Video - Garden Orb Spider Web (3:18)

Webs are strong because they have all kinds of different elements that make them an ingenious creation--the anatomy of the spider, the intricacy of the design, different kinds of silk for different parts of the web. And within the mind of the spider is a vision worth working toward. A vision of intricate connection that attends to details for the good of the whole web--a vision worth living and even dying for. She finds her purpose in the painstaking creativity.

She builds from the inside out--using her inner resources to engage the world around her with maximum capacity to build something that can last.

1 John invites us to pay attention to the details of what makes up our community, to what it is that makes our community strong. Because the only sure way to build beloved community is with LOVE--and that love must be from God. The kind of love we can recognize by its healing and transforming effects.

Have you been paying attention, Grace Covenant, to what God is building? Have you been seeing what God is doing? Or just seeing what you want to see. Can you see the intricacy and beauty of what love can create? God is creating, spinning out breathtaking possibilities--the details of it truly are awe inspiring. If you pay attention you can see Her handiwork all over our community--where love is making us stronger, where love is stretching us, where love is shoring us up, where love is expanding, where love is going deep, where love is creating connections that are actively healing some of the deepest wounds of our world, where love is liberating, where love is setting us free to be bold and beloved, to be bold because we are beloved.

Image - GCPC Web

Faith 4 Justice
YTL
Just Funding
Bible Study
Circles
Councils,
Committees
Teams
Session
Deacons
Connect
Adventure
Youth
Adult formation
Men's Group
Cards
Phone calls
Meals
Prayer Shawls
Garden produce

Think about all of our new members--our expanded sanctuary without walls!

Stacey and Kelly from Seattle

Karen Rohls from Florida

Sidney from Austin, TX

Natalily from Tucson, AZ

And so many of you out there--Laura and Jessica from Nashville, John and Maria from New Jersey, Eric and Truly from Louisville, Mary from

Virginia. Loyda from Utah

Buzz and Pat from the Pacific NW

Hortons from Nags Head

Christa from Virginia with her sister Pat

Joyce from PA

It is your boldness, Grace Covenant, during this difficult year, that makes our community beloved.

And so as we move into this next phase, we must continue to stretch and to deepen--to do the inner work that shines through in who we are becoming.

Christ at the center—building from the inside out.

I love you and that's why I want you to do the work, the intentional work of building deeper and trustworthy relationships with the intention of making our community stronger and more trustworthy for the whole community, not just for some.

As people are getting vaccinated and we are starting to see a pathway opening up for us to meet face to face without creating harm for our community, I am sensing some anxiety from some of you.

That makes sense. This has been an intense year--and a lot of things have changed. None of us are the same people as we were when this pandemic set in. And our community is not the same. We are moving into a new place together, not going back to a former way of being together. The love that creates us is the love that transforms us--and so what God is doing in our midst is something to behold.

If you feel fear and anxiety, that's ok. The question is, are you willing to look deeply at where the fear and anxiety is coming from and what those feelings are about?

Using honest conversation with each other and within ourselves builds stronger connections to lean into the strength of the web of connection God is weaving even now with such beautiful intention and vision.

If you have resisted the inner work—the stretching is going to be harder and more stressful and anxiety producing for you.

If you have given yourself to the inner work, you are more likely to feel the life-giving energy of what is unfolding, the web that is forming and strengthening to be a place of liberation and transformation

To be Bold and the Beloved is to be transformed from the inside, out, by the love that sees the beautiful possibilities in who we can be.

I see you, Grace Covenant. I see all the ways you are tapping into the boldness that comes from liberating love--as you lean into to the work of dismantling white supremacy within yourself, you begin to catch glimpses of what God is doing--the beautiful future that is starting to be born.

I saw it this week when some of us gathered after the Derek Chauvin verdict--when we trusted each other with raw feelings and with the pain that comes from generations of state sanctioned violence.

How do we know God's love is at the center of the future that is unfolding, the community we are creating, the new life gestating, the midwifing skills we are learning, the trust we are building?

- He laid down his life for us
- Responded when he saw pain, woundedness, suffering, trauma
- Active and dynamic--not just talk, but manifested in relationships, action, moments in time, deep connection
- Bold calling in when there is injustice, violence, harm
- A clear conscience, a bold heart
- That love is not reserved for the few, but is for the world and every sentient being therein.

GCPC our web is getting stronger as we get more connected--as we deepen our relationships and get more honest with ourselves and each other. There are beautiful things happening every day that are stitching together a beautiful future for Grace Covenant. I pray you open your eyes and open your hearts to all of it!

God is inviting us to leave behind any old habits of spinning tangled webs of deceit and lies, but to believe in the work of creating a beautiful, strong community built on truth--bold truth and bold love.

Let's let this good news of God's transforming creativity in our midst sink in more deeply today.

Take a deep breath and spend some more time as we culminate this Sunday's proclamation of God's good news with just one of the one places where GCPC is learning how to be bold and beloved--that's in our partnership with Faith 4 Justice, Asheville, and our dear sister Rev. Tami Forte-Logan. Many of you have been to Faith 4 Justice meetings and gatherings, many of you have worked with Rev. Tami, and even more of you have been impacted by the transforming work of Faith 4 Justice.

The faithful and intricate work of Faith 4 Justice Asheville is helping to make us all stronger.

And God's love is clearly the common thread!

To be bold and beloved is to believe in a beautiful future indeed!

Video - Faith for Justice promo (5:50)