

Sun., Sept. 13:

Message Series: Messy: Loving Others Isn't Easy

Message Series Theme Verse: "Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." -Leviticus 19:18b

Memory Verse: "Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." -Leviticus 19:18b

Message: "Messy Love: Forgiveness"

Scripture: Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

Blurb: We begin our fall message "Messy: Loving Others Isn't Easy!" Love messes with us: making us honestly deal with the messes in our lives, and it makes us really deal with the messes others cause for us. Forgiveness is a very messy part of love! Yet only forgiveness releases us as we release others. This Sunday we'll invite the Holy Spirit to bring this healing in and through us. Come ready for a mess!

Out door worship.

Offering boxes available as people leave.

Parking spaces designated for drive in worshipers.

Sicky notes inside the bulletins.

OPENING MUSIC: *Love Is a Mess* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." -Leviticus 19:18b

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Enough

Goodness of God

Blest Be the Tie that Binds

Worship Prayer -Pastor Andrew

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE -Pastor Andrew

PRAYERS -Pastor Andrew

Church educational program

Kids and schools

MESSAGE: Messy: Loving Others Isn't Easy #1: Forgiveness -Pastor David

(Drawing upon a sermon by the same title by Pastor Scott Carroll, Outbreak Church.)

Messy: Loving Others Isn't Easy! I thought I would get an "amen!" right off the bat! Well, this is our fall message series. I had some questions submitted to me for our summer series about how Christians are to relate to others in this climate of 1. seemingly endless quarantining and having to spend so much time with people we love, yes, but who can be also so difficult to get along with,

2. our climate of mudslinging in our election year, 3. our climate of protest and anger and violence, what's become known as cancellation culture - a current form of just putting up the hand towards those we can't stand. In this kind of culture, what are we, who the Bible calls "light on a hill" supposed to look like? We are called to be Jesus' disciples. What does that mean people see when they see us in this caustic culture?

We are called to live an alternative. Think about that. When people see us, they are supposed to see a different way of living. A contrast to what they see everywhere else. Be honest with yourself. Do you look different than our culture? Do you stick out in a conversation, offering a different input than normal? Does your presence—physically, or verbally, *or digitally*—change the dynamic?

The alternative we are called by our Lord to live, is *love*. We are to love. That's what makes us different. One way to define godly love is the commitment to put the welfare of others ahead of ourselves. Love is putting others first. This is so hard, especially in this broken culture based on self-centeredness. Love is a radical alternative. Real love is rare, but others are supposed to see it in us!

So, this next message series is grabbing on the Bible's charge to love, with godly love, in all of what it really means. And it's time we get honest about that. Our culture desperately needs the salty flavoring of godly love right now! We're going to respond to the hate, the anger, the violence, the cancellation, not by arguing more or yelling more or saying more: we're going to dig deep, plant our feet solidly, and start loving as radically as the Bible calls us to.

So, Christians—Bible-believers, Jesus followers—are you ready to commit to this? It's not easy. We are covered in the slime of our culture. We are wired to behave its way. But we, here, today, commit to love, as Jesus has called us to love.

It's just so messy—it messes with our lives, every single part of it! And it's messy to do. It's hard. It calls us right to the middle of the ugliness of our world. Love opens the door, turns on the light, takes a deep breath, and walks right into the messy room while rolling up our sleeves to get busy. Are you ready for that, Church? Now is when we walk the talk!

And we begin by jumping right into the deep end. Forgiveness. (Ooo...check please!)

In four specific instances, the Bible gives the clarion call for God's people to love our neighbors as ourselves. Four times the Bible blasts this right out there. And so, over the next four weeks, we're going to take up this calling, and commit to make it the way of our lives.

The first comes back on Mount Sinai, when God gave the Law—including the 10 Commandments—to the Hebrew people, whom He had chosen to make into His people.

The 10 Commandments are the summary of love: the first four being to love God, and the last six to love others. Then, God elaborated, through Moses, the fuller explanation of this law of love in terms of the covenant God makes with people. We have it in our Bibles as the Book of Leviticus.

Turn to the middle of this law, this covenant. Turn to Leviticus 19. We're still on the top of Mount Sinai. God started out with the 10 Commandments, and now He's been flushing out the details. This is what it looks like to live in covenant with God...what it looks like in specific instances, to live out the godly love in holiness. Let's drop in at Leviticus 19. Verse 1: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the whole community of the Israelites: 'You must be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.''" Holiness! Then God goes back into listing what this looks like in specific instances. Skip down to verse 15. Here we're into what holiness means in treating others, those we live around. "'You must not act unjustly in a legal case. Do not show favoritism to the poor or deference to the great; you must judge your fellow Israelites fairly. 16 Do not go around slandering your people. Do not stand by while your neighbor's blood is shed; I am the Lord. [God keeps inserting this all over this section of the Law. We base our holy loving on God...not on what we see,

or what we feel: but on God. Verse 17,] You must not hate your fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your fellow Israelite strongly [it means here when you see them sinning against others], so you don't become responsible for his sin. [Verse 18] You must not take revenge nor hold a grudge against any of your people; instead, you must love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.”

There's the first of the four times the Bible gives this command. And notice, God backs it up with, “I am the Lord.” You know this command because Jesus famously says it's the second greatest commandment. The first is to love God, and the second is to love your neighbor.

But here, embedded within in the Covenant of Holiness, this first calling to love our neighbors is a long description of...forgiveness! See? We've jumped into the deep end.

Now, the Bible talks a lot about forgiveness. It's a pillar of salvation, of our relationship with God and with others. It's a pillar of authentic love. We *talk* a lot about it as God's people, but I fear we don't *live* it out very well. The slime of our culture coats us so thickly that we have a hard time actually *doing* it. We know we should, but we resist, and make excuses.

Forgiveness is a pillar of God's very character. God came in Jesus in order to forgive us our sins. God gives this covenant of love—with this focus on forgiveness—*after* God has already forgiven the Israelites and chosen them to be His people. God forgave them, *and then* calls them to a life of forgiveness. Don't ever lose sight of this. Godly forgiveness, in the Bible, is always connected to God's first forgiveness of us. We Methodists talk about this as prevenient grace.

Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer, right? “Our Father, who is in heaven,” right? The very middle of the prayer we always pray, is “forgive us our sins [or trespasses or debts] as we forgive those who sin against us.” Do you see? As Jesus taught us, our forgiveness is linked to us forgiving others, and our forgiving of others is linked to our own forgiveness. Hang on to that. You're not going to like it, but you're going to need it in a bit!

I need to define a few words so we can talk about forgiveness. Write down the phrase, “getting what you deserve.” Label that “justice.” This is how we usually define justice. In all protests we've seen, they talk about justice like this. What people *deserve*.

Now, take the word “not” and insert it right before “deserve,” the last word of your phrase. “Getting what you do NOT deserve.” Label this grace. God's great love on us is grace. God forgiving us, reconciling us to Himself, this is grace. I teach my confirmation kids that G.R.A.C.E. is “Gifts Received At Christ's Expense.” We don't deserve it, but we get it. Grace.

Now, take the word “not” and move it to the beginning of the phrase, before the word “getting,” so it reads, “NOT getting what you deserve.” Label this “mercy.” Sinners deserve death and hell, but in love, God shows us mercy, and we are spared from what we deserve.

Okay, take a look at these three definitions, and let it soak in: forgiveness is an expression of love: it is mercy, grace, and justice.

I'll name it up front: forgiveness is hard. Mercy, grace and justice all mean putting the other first. Our culture is based on selfishness. Love is based on *selflessness*. Forgiveness does not come naturally. It is counter-cultural. It is the alternative we live as God's people.

Now, I hope you feel your neck bristling and your back stiffening and your jaw setting. I hope you're engaged enough to start seeing the warning lights go off inside as you realize this is cutting to your heart. You and I, where we lack holiness is in two directions. We need to be forgiven, and we have not been. Or, we need to forgive someone else, and we haven't.

I know this brings up all kinds of pain and deep woundedness. Some of us are carrying such wrenching violation that we've only been able to cope by suppressing it, pushing it down. I want you to hear the Gospel today. God intends for you to live fully. He wants you to be free from that pain. That can only happen when you surrender your pain and apply forgiveness.

Okay, let's start by admitting what forgiveness is not. That'll help us. You may want to write these six down.

1. Forgiveness is NOT forgetting. To forgive and forget is not biblical. Now, our moms told us that to teach us not to keep thinking about the offense, and that is good for minor offenses. Love keeps no record of wrong. But love looks straight at the offense, holds it honestly, and releases the pain. We'll come back to this. True forgiveness doesn't erase the memory. It's moving past it, living with the reality that it happened, but not letting that offense have any power any more. When we fully and truly heal from physical wounds, we still see the scars. Forgiveness does not mean going back in time and not having whatever happened, happened. Yes God remembers our sin no more, the Bible says. But for us in our love relationships before heaven, we love with memories.

2. Forgiveness is NOT going back immediately to full trusting. Those who have wounded us, even when we forgive them, do not get our immediate full trust. Trust is earned. Now, love means we cannot harbor their failure against them, but that also doesn't mean we vulnerably trust them before they have demonstrated that they can treat us well.

3. Forgiveness is NOT removal of consequences. If I hit you, and you forgive me, you still have bruises. And I, even if you forgive me, need to keep a safe distance from you until I learn to manage my issues. Forgiveness also does not remove just punishments.

4. Forgiveness is NOT ignoring the offense. It doesn't mean pretending it never happened. That's dishonest. Forgiveness is learning to live in love after something happened, not as though it never happened. The goal is living well in a real world, not hiding from a real world.

5. Forgiveness is NOT restoring the relationship to the way it was. No, healthy relationships change and grow. They incorporate what happens and love uses that to build authentic relationships. My best relationships are with those who know what I really have done, good and bad, and call me to love because of it all. Now, this also means that some relationships may need to end because of actions. That's okay, and healthy, too. Love doesn't require us to spend loads of time with everyone!

One more. 6. Forgiveness is NOT a leverage of power. Forgiveness may not forget, but it also means not holding that against someone. The purpose of forgiveness is to create freedom. A power hold against another is not freedom.

So, forgiveness is not easy, is it? As you can see, it's messy! Are you open to truly forgiving? By now the Holy Spirit has brought to mind someone you need to forgive. Perhaps it's yourself. That's hard! Perhaps it's someone very close to you. That's hard, too. Perhaps it's someone you must spend lots of time with. That's hard, too!

The Bible says that we are freed when we free others through forgiveness. We must do it radically, and a radical amount of times, if needed! Remember, our forgiving—be it ourselves or others—is linked to God's forgiveness of us. Remember how much you are forgiven. That is how we forgive others.

Here's the biblical secret: forgiveness is a choice. It's not a feeling. It is something we choose to do. We set our will, determine we will do it, and we take that step. We look at Jesus, fixate on Him, as we do it. We don't stare at the *offender*, or the *offense*. We stare at the *offering*: Jesus, who offered Himself up for our forgiveness, and to make us able to forgive. We can't do it in our own strength. But we have the Holy Spirit in us to do it through us. Corrie Ten Boom's family hid Jews in their Amsterdam home during WWII. One day their home was raided by the Gestapo, and they all went to concentration camps. Corrie's parents and sister all died. She survived and became a Christian speaker. Years later, after she finished speaking one night, a man came up to her, tears in his eyes. He confessed that he was the man who betrayed her family to the Nazis. Could she ever forgive him? After trying to compose herself for a moment, she finally said, "No. I cannot. But Christ in me, can, and does."

Here's how we do it. Seven parts. Write these down. It's not quick and easy, right?

1. Choose to release the hurt. We can forgive easily when the offense doesn't hurt. But the more it hurts, the more we hang on to it. Right? But listen to this closely: why do we hang on *to hurt*? Let it go! It's not hurting them...it's only poisoning you! That's how we know it's not godly. The only way we can do this is by giving the hurt to Jesus. Jesus took all the sin, all of our offenses, all the pain, and took it to the cross. The pain you carry, you can give it to Jesus! Take it to the cross, and lay it there. The cross makes you able to acknowledge that the pain is real! But it also is where you can put it so it doesn't wound you any more. Release the hurt.

2. Choose to release your resentment of the offender. Normally we vilify the one who hurts us. Remember, you hurt Jesus, but Jesus loves you. Look at the cross, and the same Jesus loves them. See them in love, the love the Jesus puts in you. Release your resentment and choose love.

3. Choose to release the right to hear their apology. We stay stuck in our spot and demand that they come and apologize...admit their fault! That's still keeping you first. Forgiveness is not about what *they* do. It's only about what you do. Regardless of what they do, you release them from how you deserve an apology.

4. Choose to release the right to be bitter. Talk about poison! It's a trap. But it's strong. People are willing to throw away great blessings just to hold on to bitterness.

5. Choose to release the right to get even. Give to God your claim on revenge. The God we serve tells us, "I will get revenge. That is my right, not yours." Read Romans 12:19 a few times.

6. Choose to release justice. Yes, that's what I said. We defined justice as getting what you deserve, right? Someone who wrongs you deserves retaliation. If they steal your money, they make restitution by paying it back. If they inflict pain, they can't take that back, so justice means they bear pain in order to balance things out. Our culture is obsessed with justice. Retribution. Restitution. But beware: justice *by itself* is not godly. It is only the best humans can do on our own. But the God we have is love, and true love also adds mercy and grace to justice. Forgiveness means not giving them the punishment they deserve, and giving them grace that they don't deserve.

Normally, we want justice for others, but mercy for us. We want them to be held accountable, but we want to be forgiven. Jesus calls us to extend mercy, not just justice. This is grace!

Justice alone demands that others change, demands that others do certain action. So many protestors, rather than lifting up the offense, instead demand justice. That puts the focus on the other: what they do wrong, and what they need to do to fix it. This is not the biblical way. The biblical way is to look not at them, but at ourselves. What can I do to bring life, to love? How can I forgive?

See, we're in the deep end! Love! One more: 7. Choose to release your offender into freedom. Don't make your actions of forgiveness, in any way, dependant on what they did, or do, or don't do. You release them. It's about what Jesus did for you, not what you do for them. Don't dwell on their offense. Don't bring it up. Don't think less of them, or resent them. Don't bad mouth them. For as much as it depends on you, live at peace with them.

Forgiveness is hard...so hard that we can't do it on our own. It only comes from the love of God in us. It is a work of the Holy Spirit through us. All of our natural selves, our worldly selves, screams against it. It can come only from the Holy Spirit in us.

We first go and give up our pain, our wounds, to Jesus on the cross. Then we remember how much Jesus loved us, and how He forgave us an immeasurable multitude of sin, and extended to us mercy and grace. We bask in His love. We open our hearts to receive the Holy Spirit in us, planting in us that same love. Then, and only then, do we turn to our offender and forgive.

When we don't forgive, we have to try to walk with a weighty burden on our backs. Forgiveness may mean we free others, but as we do, we find that we are freed! Our burden is lifted—thank you Jesus!—and we are able to run the race that He has laid out in front of us.

We walk with Jesus, who loves in forgiveness. That means justice, mercy and grace. This is the alternative we live in our world.

I believe the Holy Spirit has been working in our hearts this morning. God has been placing on your heart someone to forgive. Perhaps God has used someone recently to tell you that you need to forgive someone. Ask the Holy Spirit if that is His voice!

Kids, this is for you, too. Can I ask you to listen up for a second? Who makes you mad? Who do you not want to spend time with? Who do you think is mean? Has someone hurt you? Think about who that is.

In the bulletin is a stick note. Write the name of that person you need to forgive.

Maybe you need to think about that a bit. But sometime today, or at least this week, I want you to write down someone you're mad at.

Then, write down below their name, write down why you are mad at them.

Then, have a prayer time, holding that note. Think about Jesus dying on the cross to forgive you, and them. And pray for God to help you forgive them. That means asking God to bless them.

Adults, here's an idea: you may also want to do this exercise about the politician you can't stand the most. Ask God's mercy and goodness for them.

Well, kids and adults, after you've prayed for them, I want you to fold up the paper and put it by a cross somewhere in your house. Leave it there for a week, and whenever you see it, remember to pray for that person: for God to bless them, and for God to help you release your grudge against them.

If you are dealing with a pain so deep that you need prayer help today, I invite you to come and sit in front of this cross here on the benches after worship today. Members of the prayer team will come and pray with you. They will help you.

Also, if you're finding this hard, I recommend you try a little book, a pocket book, called *Forgiveness* by Jane Hunt. Write that down. It can really help you. *Forgiveness* by Jane Hunt.

Forgiveness starts with you remembering just how much Jesus forgave you, and then praying, "Jesus, forgive me my sins, as I forgive those who sin against me."

This simple prayer brings freedom...for them, and for you!

Amen.

CLOSING SONG: *Servant Song* -Sanctify

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Today after worship in Fellowship Hall: Hope Moves - Human Trafficking

This weekend: Community Care and Church De-clutter day!

Next week's message: Messy: Love Is Paying Attention

Next week: Outdoor worship! Bring lawn chair and hat.

OFFERING: -Pastor David

Please leave your offerings in the box as you leave.

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." -Leviticus 19:18b

BENEDICTION -Pastor David

CLOSING MUSIC -Sanctify