Telling Stories of Love
Matthew 22:34-40
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
October 18, 2026 (Children's Sabbath)
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

In Iowa 1 in 6 children don't get enough to eat. And when children aren't eating, their adults usually aren't either. In response to this reality, the Coralville Community Food Pantry hosted summer lunches this year partnering with local businesses and organizations to provide meals four days a week. Because this was a partnership with businesses and donors, and didn't use money that came with lots of restrictions, the meals weren't limited to only children. Rather children and adults could come and eat together. And this summer, First Christian Church volunteered to serve two of those meals. This is one of the ways we love God and love our neighbors.

Over the last three weeks our sanctuary has been overflowing with winter coats, snow pants, hats, boots, sweatshirts, and warm pants. These items were all distributed this last week through the Warm Winter Wear Distribution, an effort to make sure that our neighbors are prepared for the cold of winter. The numbers for this year aren't in yet, but last year at this event, together with other congregations and folks in the community, we served almost 350 households, distributing 1,925 coats, many of which were for children and youth. This is one of the ways we love God and love our neighbors.

Houses into Homes provides gently-used beds, furniture, and household items for families and individuals in Johnson County who are exiting homelessness, domestic violence, and other crisis situations. While they try to provide everything a household might need, they often find they have a shortage of dressers. There was a time when they felt fortunate if they could provide one dresser per household, but they have been making special efforts to provide one per bedroom. This year First Christian raised money to purchase 16 dressers and 1 nightstand. These are purchased as kits, so we also built them. This is one of the ways we love God and love our neighbors.

Loving God and loving neighbors - the two most important commandments in the Judeo-Christian tradition. And, as we heard in our scripture, they are so closely tied together that when Jesus was asked which commandment in the law is greatest, he couldn't name just one. He answered by first naming the commandment to love God, but then saying that a second is like it - to love your neighbor.

In other words, if we truly love God then love of neighbor must follow. It isn't enough to pray or read scripture or come to worship. All of these are worthy practices and I hope you continue to nurture your relationship with God in those ways.

And when we are truly loving God the evidence of that will be in how we treat our neighbors. We <u>cannot</u> separate these things.

So, I wonder. How are you showing love to your neighbor?

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Take a moment and think about that…talk about that. How are you showing love to your neighbor? And who is someone who inspires you to do so?

I trust that each of you worshipping with us can share more than one example of how you have recently shown love to your neighbor. I watch as you feed the hungry, befriend the lonely, visit those who don't get out much.

Just this last week I worked alongside some of you as we sorted coats and other clothing for the Warm Winter Wear Distribution, and I worked alongside others of you as we built dressers to be shared through Houses into Homes.

And well beyond the things that we do together as a congregation, I know so many of you simply live from a position of love and kindness.

On days like today we celebrate that *and* we are also reminded to challenge ourselves. Because sometimes we get comfortable with the things we are used to doing, sometimes even with things that come more easily to us. Sometimes we get comfortable with these actions and we let them be enough.

And yet our faith continues to call us to more. Our faith continues to ask us to respond to people's immediate needs as long as they present themselves, but additionally to dig a little deeper and wonder how we can help change the systems.

What if loving our neighbor isn't only about feeding a meal but creating a world where no one goes hungry?

What if loving our neighbor isn't only about building another shelter but about creating communities with ample affordable housing, mental health resources, and community supports?

What if loving our neighbor isn't only about having resources to shelter those coming out of situations of domestic violence but about believing those who are hurt and raising a generation of people who have relationship resources beyond violence and control.

See, the actions that we do so well - feeding meals and building homes and delivering furniture and donating money and goods - those matter. *And* they are not the whole story

Because loving our neighbor doesn't allow us to stand at a safe distance, but asks us to invest.

Loving our neighbor asks us to invest our hearts…building relationships where we don't only provide and serve, but where we listen and come to know people.

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Loving our neighbor asks us to invest our lives…giving not only what is extra or what we do not need, but being willing to change our way of life in order to help level the playing field for our neighbors.

Loving our neighbor asks us to invest our vote…not simply voting for that which is more convenient for us or that which will reduce our own tax bill, but really voting for people and legislation that are committed to creating a world that is better for our vulnerable neighbors, especially the children.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus the question in our scripture, they weren't really seeking information. They already knew the answer just as everyone around them did…just as we do. As Zina Jacque wrote, "The failure has never been informational. The failure is always somewhere between the knowing and the doing, in the space where we understand perfectly what love requires and find ourselves, quietly and repeatedly, unable to deliver it" (Commentary on Matthew 22:34-46 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary).

So, how do we take another step closer, another step deeper, another step into loving our neighbors more fully?

We do this with humility, with what theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas describes as "making interior room for the other person to matter as much as you do" (Commentary on Matthew 22:34-46 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary).

We do this with commitment, with a decision to consider not just our own needs and wants and comforts, but to truly consider the other in both our big and small decisions.

We do this with love, love that drives us "to actively, structurally, sacrificially orient [our] will toward the flourishing of another" (Commentary on Matthew 22:34-46 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary).

May it be so.

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