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“Higher Love” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman (4/9/2023, Easter Sunday)

Almighty God made the words in my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Happy seersucker day

Christ is risen.

Well done. I want to talk to you today. Well, first I have to ask a question, who here show of hands was alive in 1986?

Good job well done. How many of you know what the song of the summer was in 1986? Ah, well,

you've come to the right place, the number one song in August of 86. And it was on a very steep climb.

Up to that point was Steve Wynn Woods song higher love, beginning with that incredible drum fill in ending with Chaka Khan on background vocals. You're welcome. So that Song, written by Steve Winwood, and when asked about it, he said at the time that he was trying to write a modern him.

Because his earliest memories of music, like many of you, were in church. And he said, I heard my aunts and uncles singing those songs and hymns to God. And I wanted to help people connect with that. So he didn't use God's name, but he called it a higher love. And he kept saying in the song over and over, bring me a higher love. And maybe you don't know Steve's version, maybe you know, Saint Whitney Houston's version of that song. Maybe you don't even know that one. And you know, only cargos version of that song. But it comes back again. And again, because it is so powerful. And this need for a higher love is so deep and real. And so praise God that Steve brought it up. But

he was a little bit off the mark, in the instructions that he gives in the song about where to look for that higher love. In verse one.

Steve says that maybe it's down in the heart, or hidden in the stars

above.

Oh, ah.

Except, if you try to look for higher love, say you look in the stars above, what you find is very cold, very dark, empty space stars, just giant balls of nuclear reactions, millions of light years away. Not so much love or mercy, their beauty maybe grandeur? Yes, or maybe, but not a lot of love.

Well, what about down in my heart?

Well, I've looked

and I saw two things,

cholesterol and sin.

I mean, it's not all sin, and the statins are doing their job.

But it's certainly not all good down there. There is not a higher love. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a very brilliant Russian writer and thinker said that it's not that there's good people and bad people. He said that the line between good and evil runs right through the middle of every human heart. And so if you look for higher love in that place, the best you'll get is a very mixed bag. I would like to present some evidence to you today about the human heart and its incapacity to really reach that higher love. For example, Jesus has commandment which we all sort of know in like about loving thy neighbor.

Have you downloaded the next door app?

Those of you that aren't laughing haven't. But if you did, you will know that this app which is designed to foster communication among neighborhoods, to let people know when the Superbowl party is or the neighborhood Christmas potluck or where the pothole has showed up on Elm Street so make sure you slow down that's what it's for. But what it's turned into is you blocked my driveway your license plate number is x your cell phone number is this and we're all now going to Doc's, you it's turned into

a lot of some gossiping and it also has turned into

some some neighborhood alerts that just skirt on the edge of mild racism. So for an example, this is where you get nervous, but it's actually kind of funny. Here's where I'm going with this.

I had the next door app on my phone and I was going for I live in the day

Rudy and I was going for a walk on Austin avenue I get a notification short Hispanic mail.

On Austin Avenue. I'm not I wasn't dressed like this.

How, how dare you next door app.

That Hispanic male is me.

Aaron Michael Gonzalez Zimmerman.

So we're not so good at loving our neighbors. We're not so good either at following rules. My favorite example comes from the fact that the United States of America worked really hard to do an almost impossible thing which is amend the Constitution to prohibit the production, distribution and sale of alcohol.

And that led to a decade of temperance and moderation.

People devoted themselves to prayer and reflection on the Holy Scriptures.

Oh, wait, checks, notes, organized crime.

Alcoholism, the roaring 20s. And the United States became the world's largest importer of cocktail shakers.

True story.

watched The Great Gatsby, either the Robert Redford or the Leonardo DiCaprio, either one, that's what prohibition did. So we're not good at following rules. We're not good at loving our neighbors. And we're not really good at impulse control, you know, suppressing urges. If you want evidence for this, look at that great font of truth, the creator of the one of the best albums of 2018, and maybe the best album of 2022. The album surrender by Harvard Divinity School graduate, Maggie Rogers,

can I get a what what? So Maggie?

Maggie saying, if you want want, what you want, want, then you want it.

And she is right. We want what we want. And we tend to not deny ourselves those things that we want, we're really good at coming up with justifications why we should take them. Oscar Wilde said the best way to eliminate temptation is to yield to it.

And that's usually what we do when we want want something.

The prayer book, that red book in the pew rack in front of you contains beautiful prayers written by a brilliant theologian, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, who wrote in the

wrote those prayers in the 16th century. And one of the things that he hid the way his theology was described is very much in line with what Maggie said.

His theology was the heart wants, the will chooses, and the mind justifies.

Meaning you want what you want,

you do it. And then you are really good at inventing excuses about why that was okay for you to do it.

So that's our human heart. So looking there for higher love, just like looking in the stars above, it's not going to yield very much. So where do we go? Well, we look for the higher love and you're not going to be surprised. But it's found in the empty tomb. It's found of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, in particular, what he does after his resurrection from the dead, because one might think that rising from the dead, defeating sin death and the devil solving the biggest human problem, the fact that you're all gonna die.

One would think that he might then get together with his followers and choose the ones that had done a good job following him. And the ones that didn't do a good job following him and saying, you guys know resurrection for you, you whoever it's for you. You did well, the only problem was, nobody did well.

all the disciples deserted and fled when he was arrested. Judas betrayed him, but so did Peter. And all of them denied knowing him. And even on this morning, Easter morning, you heard in the story from John chapter 20. These people who had traveled with Jesus left everything to follow Jesus had spent three years with Jesus had heard every word he said and taught had witnessed His miracles had seen him feed the 4000 and the 5000. And do all these things raised people from the dead. He had told them about 5000 times that he was going to be arrested that he was going to die. And then he was going to rise again. And so where are they on Easter Sunday morning? Are they looking expectantly with hope for the resurrection? No, they go to the tomb to finish preparing his body for burial. Mary sees the tomb open and doesn't think oh, yeah, he said he was gonna rise again. She thinks oh, somebody stole the body.

Which is the same thing that Peter and John think as well. And if you needed any other evidence about the human heart and what it's like, I

love that John, who's the beloved disciple here in this story as he records this story as he writes the Bible, he will

wants to include the very important fact that he beat St. Peter in a foot race.

It's not about you, John.

What about my vertical? Can I include that?

Mary, when she finally does see, Jesus doesn't even recognize them. She thinks he's the gardener.

So here's the thing. For folks who need a higher love, who maybe feel like they have not done such a great job of being a Christian, not even done such a great job of being a human being

self absorbed, anxious, judgmental, procrastinating, saying harsh things to people, we love failing as a spouse failing as a parent failing in whatever way you can think of. You can fail to recognize Jesus, you can not really hear anything he says. And he still is raised from the dead, and still invites you to know that and know that's for you. And to be part of spreading that message to people that also like you don't get it and haven't done such a good job about being a human. And the reason we know this is because at the very end, Jesus does something very interesting with possessive pronouns.

Now not to say pronouns anymore, just the word many of you broke out in hives, I know. But something really important happens grammatically here.

Jesus says,

I'm a sending to my father, and your father, to my God, and your God.

He's saying that to people who maybe we're not so sure that they were in the good list anymore.

Sure, Jesus, the Son of God, God is his father.

God is his God, that makes sense. But what about the folks that lied? What about the folks that fled? What about the folks that back slid? What about the folks that deserted? What about the folks that forgot his teaching? What about the folks who haven't read their Bible? In a good five, six years? What about the people who don't do a good job of loving their neighbor or loving their god?

I'm a sending to my father,

and to your father, to my God, and to your god, you're still in, you

have not been kicked out. He is your father who loves you. He is your God who saves and redeems you.

I want to hire love.

And probably you do too, because you need one that can forgive and heal and restore. Because everybody is in crisis. At some level of life. There's some problem you can solve whether inside you and your household and your family or whatever, I don't know a single person when you get really down to it. That's not in some major form of need. You need a healing, you need a relationship restored. You need some actual crisis, financially or professionally or in some way with a child and maybe in a strange relationship. There's something that you can't fix. Maybe it's a new, maybe it's a behavior that you thought you'd figure out later on. It was a fun in your 20s but not so much in your 60s.

Everybody needs a resurrection.

The whole study, which is the best Catholic band to come out of Milwaukee,

has a song. It says she broke in during the evening mass. With her hair done up in broken glass. She told the deacon, I'll tell you how a resurrection really feels.

Y'all have come to church,

walking over broken glass to get here. The crisis in your life. The thing that makes you feel like you don't deserve the love of God.

And Jesus says to you, I go to my father, and to your father, to my God, and to your God.

The higher love the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is for you.

Amen.