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**Oak Grove UMC**  
**September, 17 2017**  
**The Mission: Love One Another**

**John 13:31-35**

<sup>31</sup>When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. <sup>32</sup>If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup>Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ <sup>34</sup>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

**(Slide 1: The Mission)**

Throughout this month we’re focusing on the Mission of the Church. We do a lot of great ministry here at Oak Grove. So much that sometimes we can get so caught up in doing and doing and doing, that we kind of lose our focus on what really matters.

So at the beginning of the summer I called together a small group to take a look at all the things we do as a church and categorize them into Ministry Areas so that we could work together more effectively. To help us focus, We asked, “what are the BIG biblical ideas that describe the essential work of the church?”

Here's what we came up with:

**(Slide 2: House Graphic)**

Love God. Based on Deuteronomy 6: 5

Love One Another. Based on John 13:34

Meet Together. Based on Hebrews 10:25

Reach Out to care for the least of these. Based on Matthew 25:40

Good Stewards. Based on 1 Peter 4:10

Essentially, the mission of the Church is love.

Loving God,  
loving one another,  
meeting together to stay focused on love,  
Reaching out to love our neighbors through service and  
being good stewards of the resources God has provided us so that we can  
love all the more.

This week's focus is: Love One another, based on John 13:34

**(Slide 3: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13:34)**

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

In our culture we tend to define love as a feeling.  
The flutter of our hearts when we meet that certain someone.  
The way the earth shifts when you hold your baby, or grandbaby in your hands.  
The comforting warmth of friendship...

But the love that Jesus commands us to have for one another is a verb not a noun.

Christian Love is something we do. Not just something we feel.

**(Slide 4: Love is a behavior, not a feeling)**

Love is being patient with difficult people.  
Love is being kind when we don't feel like it.  
Love challenges us to put other's feelings and fragile egos before our own feelings and fragile egos.  
Love looks like being flexible even when we'd really like to do it our way  
And not being irritable or resentful about it.  
Love doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing, even when we could benefit from it,

But rejoices in the truth, even when the truth hurts.  
Love bears all things – including one another's burdens,  
Love believes beyond believing,  
Hopes in things not yet seen  
And endures the length and the trials of the journey, trusting in God even  
when we no longer trust ourselves.  
The work of Love never ends... at least according to the author of 1  
Corinthians chapter 13.

The real work of love isn't maintaining fuzzy feelings for the people we see  
every day. The real work of love is behaving in a loving way  
even when,  
especially when  
we don't feel very loving.

The Love that God asks of us is a behavior, not a feeling.

When Jesus said, "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you  
have love for one another." (Jn 13:35) he wasn't being idealistic. He was  
just speaking the truth.

We live in a world that's not very loving.  
Impatience, greed, insisting on having things our own way, rudeness,  
cynicism, hopelessness. – sadly, these are all normal.

Loving one another is not normal.  
Being kind to people who don't "deserve" it .  
Putting other's needs before our own.  
Choosing to be compassionate instead of critical.  
It's weird.  
It's so weirdly not the way that people usually behave that love in action is  
how people see God.

**(Slide 5: Love in action is how people see God.)**

On those brief occasions when we can struggle past our human pettiness and really let God's love shine through our behaviors, no matter what we're feeling, it's in those moments that we become God's hands and feet, God's hugs and meaningful words for one another.

Here at Oak Grove United Methodist, we're not perfect at it, because no one is perfect at it, but we've made an effort to be intentional about loving one another in several ways.

**(Slide 6: Love one another house portion)**

The Nurture Team works to help people continue to feel connected and included when their life circumstances have made it hard for them to participate in the activities of the church. Sometimes, loving one another looks like a card, or a phone call, or a visit and home communion.

The Prayer chain practices love for one another by holding one another in prayer. Sometimes love looks like knowing that somebody else knows what you're going through and knowing that they will pray, even if you cannot.

We also express love for one another through scholarships for our youth and in sharing in the work of providing nibbles and beverages for coffee hour so that children are welcomed with a cookie and adults can chat over a cup.

A growing edge of love that we have chosen, is the work of inclusion – a team still needs to be formed to work on how we live out our reconciling statement to truly make ALL people feel welcome -- young or old; rich or poor; straight or queer; married, divorced or single; all ethnicities -- everyone.

Because loving one another means more than tolerating or \*allowing\* people who are different to be among "us," loving one another means that

we embrace and incorporate everyone's beautiful diversity into our definition of "us."

And as with all of these missional areas there's overlap.

**(Slide 7: House graphic)**

- Our administrative choices, like opening our building to AA groups, and community events like the Summer Fest are actions that preach our willingness to love our community far louder than my sermons.
- The volunteers who teach our Sunday School, the ushers who point the way to the cry room or rest room, or offer a busy bag, and the kind folks in the pews who offer an understanding smile to a harried parent, rather than a judgmental glare, shows parents that we love them and their wiggly, noisy children.
- And reaching out into our community to serve and connect with people we might be tempted to fear: the homeless, the poor, our unfamiliar neighbors, the youth who flood the sidewalks after class lets out at New Urban High school, reaching out shows them, by our love, that we really are followers of Jesus who are willing to love and accept them.

The Love that Jesus commands us to practice is visible, tangible and active. But it's also a love that is commanded by a loving God.

God doesn't want us to work ourselves into burn out!

God isn't asking us to do every good thing in the world, or even every good thing in our little community of Oak Grove.

This is why it's so important to spend time doing these 3 things:

**(Slide 8: 3 things)**

1. **Be a part of the conversation.** Part of Methodist spirituality is that we believe that God speaks to us through one another. If there are

20 people who are interested in doing a ministry or no people who are interested in doing a ministry, that's a pretty good indication of what God wants us to do here and now. Attend a town hall meeting on Sunday, Sept 24 at 4:30pm or Monday, Sept 25 at 1pm, and share what God has been speaking to your heart.

2. **Pray.** One method that works for me, is to ask God a question, like, "who are you asking me to love right now?" It just takes a moment each day to ask God, "where are we at on this love question?" And usually after a few days or a few weeks I start to get a sense of direction.
3. Respond to God's call and **serve.** I really like the missional phrase. Show up, pay attention, cooperate with God and release the outcome. The real work is in showing up and paying attention -- then when we cooperate with God, that's when God starts doing the heavy lifting and pretty soon we're looking at an outcome that has multiplied like loaves and fishes.

When we're following the passion that God has placed in our hearts and cooperating with God together and the spirit is moving, ministry is fun!

Let's discern together: How is God calling us to live out our Mission of Love here and now?

Then let's do it!