

“Love in Action”  
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III  
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana  
April 22, 2018

**1 John 3: 16-24**

Two weeks ago, we had a pretty fun time as a church. That was when the youth of John Knox hosted their first Lip Sync Battle as a fundraiser for their summer mission trip. They took a risk and tried something totally new, and you all supported them by showing up, laughing, cheering, participating, donating money, and well, laughing some more. I’ve had a couple of folks say to me, “Frank, we saw a completely different side of you that evening!” Indeed, I did not know I had that side of me to show. But when it’s for the kids and for Jesus, well, you just have to shake it off(!).

I think what made that evening so much fun was to see how much the youth of our church got into it. To see them dancing and singing and full of energy and excitement made us all feel uplifted and energized. It was clear this was something they were passionate about, and I don’t know about you, but that just filled my heart with happiness and warmth. I remember that week had been particularly rough for me, dealing with the after-effects of Holy Week and Easter, and other stressful issues that were going on. As Debbie and I drove home from church that Sunday evening, I told her, “Man, I needed that.” I’m sure many of us felt the same way.

As a parent and a pastor, I have always felt incredibly blessed to be part of this church that welcomes children and youth. It has been present from the moment I arrived fifteen years ago, when you included two youth as a part of the search committee that called me as pastor. And it’s continued to be imbedded in your congregational DNA, through the many ways you invite children and youth to participate in worship, by providing opportunities for them to learn and grow and serve, and by sending them from here out into the world as disciples of Jesus Christ.

In times when I am feeling down about the church’s future, I only need to look at our young people to bring me back to a sense of hope and joy. I was in a meeting this week at Second Presbyterian Church, and the leader asked us to reflect on Micah 6:8 - “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.” The leader asked us to consider people in our lives who reflect this passage. And I immediately thought of my two girls. I won’t embarrass them by saying this, because they aren’t here! But the reason they aren’t here is due to one of the many acts of kindness they continually seek to share in this world.

Erin and Heather and Maddie Andrews and others from our church are downtown today for the Best Buddies Friendship Walk along the canal. It is a fundraiser for Best Buddies of Indiana, an organization that seeks to end the social, economic and physical isolation people with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience every day. It is a wonderful organization that pairs students in the schools as buddies, and they form friendships and mentor one another, showing the world the great value all human beings have in the eyes of God. My daughters have taught me so much about how to welcome others without judgment or prejudice, to treat others how I would wish to be treated, and to not dwell on all that is bad about someone, but to first see the good. Through their eyes and the eyes of all our youth, I believe we are given the greatest example of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God.

I also thought of our young people when I read our scripture lesson for today from 1 John. In this passage, the writer describes love not as a sentimental emotion, but as being lived out in actions. “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (3:18). This reality comes from our understanding of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (3:16). Because God has shown us such great love in the life, death, and resurrection of his only Son, we are compelled to express and share that same love in self-giving ways with our fellow children of God.

Isn’t it funny that no matter the time or place, the Bible can often seem like it was written yesterday? How many times do we say, “I just can’t help today” – when we pass someone begging on the street, or we receive a request in the mail from a charity, or we turn down a request for coffee from a friend who needs to talk. And then we read, “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 to help?” (3:18).

I can tell you that verse went right through me when I read it, for I am as guilty as anyone with being stingy with my time or my resources. I can rationalize my way out of anything – “I’ve got a lot on my plate right now”; “I’ve got six years of college tuition ahead of me”; “I’ve got this, I’ve got that . . .” But then. How can I say that God’s love abides in me and I possess so much of the world’s goods, and then make excuses? How can any of us claim such excuses or rationalizations?

This passage challenges us on many levels, not the least of which is our need for self-care. Look, we all get over-extended, we get stretched in too many directions, and we need to have time that is centered on ourselves. If we don’t do that, then we won’t be any good for anyone at all. But one of the temptations of that desire is that we lose our sense of balance between self-care and self-giving, and we forget to keep sharing acts of love with others.

David Heim writes: *The British have coined the term “jobsworth” to describe a person who won’t lift a finger to do more than the bare minimum their job requires. Ask jobsworths to exert themselves and they’ll decline, saying, “It’s more than my job’s worth.” A jobsworth frustrates colleagues and casts a cloud of lethargy over the workplace.*

*The worldview of the jobsworth is directly opposed to the one at the heart of 1 John. Whereas the jobsworth looks out only for oneself and stays within the narrow confines of the job description, the writer of 1 John calls on community members constantly to look beyond themselves and even be ready “to lay down [their] lives for each other” (3:16).*

*As annoying and unattractive as the jobsworth can be, the attitude raises some fundamental questions: What is a job worth? What makes it worth investing time and energy in this project or that one? To what should we be ready to give our lives? And aren’t there demands on our soul or integrity to which we rightly say, “That’s more than the job’s worth”?*

*The problem in our work lives is not so much that a job’s not worth the effort; it’s that, in God’s eyes, our jobs are worth more than we can imagine. Each task and relationship is an opportunity either to encourage one another in faith and hope and the celebration of creation, or to undermine that faith, hope, and joy (David Heim, [The Christian Century](#), March 28, 2018: 25).*

One of the things that is most disappointing to me is to witness a “jobsworth.” To see someone who is so incredibly gifted and talented and has so much to offer, and then that person simply does the bare minimum and not a fraction more, it pains me to no end. Because more than likely, unlike how the world judges that person as snobbish or conceited, I see someone who, because of their woundedness and brokenness, does not feel safe to give beyond their “jobsworth.” If that is us, or if that is someone we know and love, what would it take to move us from the minimum, and instead give abundantly through acts of love? What is holding us back, or holding someone else back? What reconciliation, redemption, or healing needs to take place to reflect the love of Christ which abides in us as children of the living God?

Today, we will welcome two new disciples into the church of Jesus Christ and John Knox Presbyterian Church. Samantha Lamey and Nicholas Graves have been a part of the confirmation class this spring. They, along with their adult mentors, Bev Ray and Don Baumgardner, have studied, learned, questioned, and grown in all aspects of the Christian faith through classes, personal study, service activities, and a retreat. Samantha and Nicholas are confirming the baptismal vows that were made on their behalf by their parents, professing for themselves their desire to be a full and active disciple of Jesus Christ.

One of the questions they will be asked is: “Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, share in its worship and ministry through your prayers and gifts, your study and service, and so fulfill your calling

to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?” Perhaps that is a question that should not be asked only of Samantha and Nicholas, but of all of us, as well.

In our acts of love, how are we fulfilling our calling as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are we contributing to our fullest capacity to the life of Christ’s Church, or are we being jobsworth’s in our study, worship, service, and giving? Are we seeking to repay others in the same measure of love and kindness when they take the time to listen and help, even when we are so consumed by our own problems that we forget to ask them how they are doing? Are we out-of-balance between self-care and self-giving, and are we open to the assistance we need to get ourselves back into a healthy balance? Will we follow the Lord’s commandment to its fullest: “that we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he has commanded us” (3:23)?

How are we called today to be a faithful disciple as part of this congregation? May we respond to that call as the writer of 1 John exhorts us:

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

Thanks be to God. Amen.