

Let us pray... Healing God, teach us how to rest, how to love, and how to preserve life and bring vitality to our withered world... Amen.

Watching love being lived out is a beautiful gift... And being a part of that love is an even better gift...

However, love, especially in our society, is often reserved for family or close friends...

And yet, Scripture paints a different picture, a different reality of what love can be.

And this expansive way of love doesn't stop with Scripture... It continues on in Jesus, showing up in our lives, in how we love, and in how we understand love...

Because there is always something new to learn about love.

Especially since it is easy to fall into rhythms and habits—going through the motions of love and reserving love just for people in your comfort zone.

Because it is hard, and a little uncomfortable, to show love to a complete stranger...

And it can be very hard to love someone who thinks differently than you...

Especially when we are in an election year, and with all that is happening around this heated situation...

Our country is deeply divided.

Divided in a way that no longer seems to welcome healthy debate and genuine dialogue... But instead thrives on judgment, labeling, and the us vs them mentality on both sides of the division.

And this dehumanization, this labeling of someone as the other takes away their humanity... In our minds they go from being a person created in the beautiful image of God with a family and friends to some label... Which erases our common human connection.

Which in turn enforces harmful and hurtful actions to them or groups of people.

And this is where Jesus shows up in our gospel today... Maybe it wasn't an election year for Jesus... But Jesus shows up by standing up for the other.

In a way that goes directly against societal norms and even societal law, by healing someone on the Sabbath.

A healing that wasn't to save someone from a life-or-death illness, but a healing of a withered hand.

A person, who because of his hand, would have been an outcast from society... He would have been judged and looked down upon... Further, he wouldn't have been able to provide or care for his family, so they too would have been outcast with him.

Which means that Jesus did more than simply heal a hand...

Jesus restored this person to wholeness and reinstated his dignity... And by doing so Jesus also restored the entire family, bringing them into the fullness of life that God desires for all of God's creation.

Which means that this is no simple healing... This is a deep and profound act of love...

The kind of love that brings about restoration, vitality, and life.

The same kind of love Jesus calls us to be a part of... By recognizing the full humanity in each person.

This is Jesus' way of showing us that we can go against the grain of society and whatever the norms might be.

This is Jesus' way of inviting us to show love every day. By extending kindness over hatred, or by being curious over casting judgment...

Every day we have the opportunity to live into our call as Christ followers, by showing others that there is a different way to live.

A way that might feel overwhelming because of the many loud voices out there...

And a way that may be hard sometimes because it may require sacrifice...

As being a Christ follower often involves the sacrifice of letting go...

Letting go of the notion that you are in control... Letting go of certain thoughts...

And maybe even letting go of what you thought you knew about love... So that you can embrace a more Christ like love.

And I get that this is hard... Any change is hard... And I also struggle with this daily...

And even though I struggle... And even though I seem to fail more often than sail... I like to remind myself that the struggle is what makes room for growth...

The struggle is like digging up soil, tilling it, cultivating it, maybe even adding some compost to it so that something good and beautiful can grow.

As this kind of struggle is our wresting match with God... This is a place for us to poke and prod God so we can learn, and grow, and love deeper...

By learning how to stretch our hearts towards inclusivity...

To not give up, but to also take time to rest and reflect on the struggle and what we have learned from tilling up our garden...

Because this cycle of work and rest, and work and rest, allows for the seeds to grow.

Which is why God gave us the Sabbath... As a time to honor you... And as a reminder that all life needs to be honored...

As all of creation was given the gift of the Sabbath, so that all of creation could be restored to wholeness and experience true freedom and flourishing.

Which is why the Sabbath is a gift from God's love.

Which is why love always surpasses the Sabbath... Because every day is a great day to love... Every day is a great day for us to do what is good...

Every day we have an opportunity to learn more about God's love... To expand our hearts and to imagine the depths of what we are being called to cultivate.

To not only witness love being lived out but to embrace new and different ways of being in relationship. To invite healing, wholeness, and vitality to all people.

Because together we can do this. Together with Christ we can be God's love lived out in the world... Amen.