

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 3, 2017

Text: Romans 12:9-21

Theme: "The Real Deal"

"You're putting me on!" I don't know the origin of that phrase but I know it's not a put on; it's for real. We know it means one is not being truthful. Scripture, Paul in particular, does speak of putting on many things, love included. We read in Colossians 3:12-14, Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.¹⁴ **And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.**" The figure he is using is not that of faking it, but of clothing ourselves in these things, outerwear for the new creation in Christ.

Today Paul speaks of love that is not a put on; that is, it is authentic, genuine, the real deal. The word that is translated "genuine" has something to do with "put on" or more correctly "not putting on." The word is *anhypocritos*, unhypocritical. It means no disguise, not an act, not faked. In the Greek theater actors wore masks. It could be a happy mask, sad mask, a woman mask (I believe all the actors were males) or others. No actual masks have survived. We know of them from references and sculptures that include them. Well, one has survived. I have one here that amazingly is in good condition. We read, "let love be genuine," then Paul unfolds what the real deal looks like. The real deal has real application, has made and will make a real difference.

There are some really good words here in Romans 12. The last word in the letter to the Romans is the same as the last word in the Bible, "amen." (Romans 16:27) Who

would not say “amen” to much of what Paul writes here, believer and unbeliever alike? What he writes has much appeal. He speaks of loving one another with a brotherly affection. People want to be all about love do they not? He speaks of contributing to needs, showing hospitality, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep. We see many of these things being put into action right now for those who were in Harvey’s path. And Paul gives voice to living in harmony. Would not almost all agree these are good things, even a utopia of sorts to strive for?

But consider also whom Paul is addressing. He is writing to good people, the beloved of God, called saints. No, they were not born or even conceived good, but they had been reborn, believed the Gospel, now new creations in Christ Jesus. Just like Paul they were certainly not ashamed of the Gospel. By the Spirit they were those who cried out, “Abba, Father.” They heard Paul’s good words and they were called to put them into good action first of all among themselves. All this would produce many smiles, not hard to put one on that was not put on, the real deal.

But there are also some really hard things here. In verses 9-13 we are just rolling along, all is desirable and at least feasible to put into practice. But then we run straight smack into verse 14, “bless those who persecute you.” Actually this is the first command, imperative, we have in the Greek, “bless and do not curse.” All those actions or attitudes before were expressed in participles, but we will get to that later. There is another interesting Greek fact here. The same verb that is translated “seek to show,” in verse 13, “seek to show hospitality,” is translated “persecute” in verse 14. The verb, *dioko*, means to pursue vigorously, “get after it.” So we are called to “get after it” regarding hospitality in verse 13 and in verse 14 to bless those who “get after us” because of our faith.

Interesting or not, it can make it hard to put on a smile on our face, and a smile showing may be a put on, a bit suspect. The mouth is smiling, but the eyes may begin to say something else. We may be a little suspicious of others. We may give to the needs of others, and we may put on pleasantries in person, but away from them it may become evident that those smiles were just a put on, not happy with give at all.

Yes, it can be a put on, but a façade. Here we read of rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. In 1 Corinthians 13:6 Paul tell us, “Love does not rejoice in the evil, but rejoices [with others] in the truth.” But there is another kind of love in us, a competing love, the love of me in a totally self-centered way. This is the selfish love of me that want to promote me because after all we are talking about me. Yes, what matters is me and this “meness” does delight in evil happening to others. Yes there may be rejoicing on the outside with those who rejoice and weeping on the inside with those who weep but on the inside something different. There is weeping on the inside as we think, “now why didn’t that happen to me, should have been me!” And for the evil on others we may be weeping on the outside, but on the inside the satisfying smile of, “yes, it’s about time!”

Yes, Paul writes, “let love be genuine,” the real deal. But it’s hard to get excited about the real deal when you are being served up the raw deal. What Paul writes is so hard as he speaks of not meeting evil with evil, not avenging ourselves. If we do this, will not people walk all over us? He writes to meet evil head on with good. If your enemy is hungry, well then feed him, if he is thirsty then give him a drink. Would it not be more reasonable when he’s down like this to rejoice in his bad fortune? We, that old meness, would rather get to the burning coals part. Yeah, just smoke his brain, now you’re talking!

Before we go any further let's go back to a little more background. Paul may likely have written this letter to the Romans from Corinth while he was on his third missionary journey. Earlier on that same journey he may have written 1 and 2 Corinthians from Ephesus. We see a similar pattern in order of subject matter in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 and Romans 12. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul speaks of spiritual gifts and in 13 he moves to use of those gifts guided by love. In Romans 12:1-8 he speaks of life in the body as bodies are offered as sacrifices living, holy, and pleasing, life in the body that includes spiritual gifts to individuals to be used together in the body of Christ. Now like as in 1 Corinthians 13 Paul moves on to speak of love. Here that love is described (9-21), this is what this real deal love looks like. It may be better to let the original Greek construction have its say here, and not be so quick to turn descriptions into commands.

Let me demonstrate, lest you fear I am striking on our my own, this was all brought to my attention in this big blue book, , *Concordia Commentary/Romans 9-16* by Michael Middendorf, (he also wrote the prequel, *Concordia Commentary/Romans 1-8*), *This love is unhyprocritical. You are those abhorring the evil, those clinging to the good. In brotherly love [you are] those showing affection. In honoring one another [you are] those taking the lead. In zeal [you are] those who are not lazy. In the Spirit you are those on fire. You are those serving the Lord. In hope, you are those rejoicing, in tribulation, you are those enduring, in praying, you are those staying with it, to the needs of the saints, you are those supplying, you are those pursuing hospitality.*

Then comes the command to bless those who persecute, bless and not curse. Here is what the real deal looks like. But there would you ever find love like that? “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Matthew 16:21) “God shows His own love for us in this, while we were yet

sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) “This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

Peter objected big time, Peter who had just confessed Jesus to be the Son of God, had no plan for the Son of God to suffer and die, ‘no, Lord, never you!’ But Jesus’ objection to Peter’s objection was even bigger, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Matthew 16:23) Peter’s mind was probably filled with visions of glory for his Master and for himself, time of smiles as Jesus ruled from Jerusalem. But the way of God was the way of the cross. That was the way of love.

It is the real deal love. It is the love that will not be conquered by evil, instead it will conquer evil with good. The evil one does his worst but God’s love conquers. Jesus would not be distracted by well intentioned or me centered followers. His face was indeed set to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). The greatest evil would be brought against Him. Like He said He would suffer many things and be killed, a horrible death on the accursed cross. But there He would be conquering the evil one. He would die there as the sacrifice for all the evil thoughts, all the evil words, all the evils deeds of all who ever lived or will live, full recompense is received, He takes it all, for our sin. The evil one can’t threaten us with being in hell with him, for the Holy One has made that entirely unnecessary. Our Lord completed the actions of the words He spoke to His apostles, on the third day He was raised. He has conquered death. In Christ God has smiled on us.

His real deal love gives us new life and transforms us. Now the real deal love flows through us. We are continuing in our transformation. As we bear our crosses we are directed to the One who endured for us who is now at the right hand of the Father interceding for us, the One who has poured out His Spirit. In Him even if we have the

raw deal of losing our life, we have saved it, been saved already. Now we can begin to conquer evil with good, more glow to the coals by feeding and giving a drink when laughing or kicking would have been more expected. Augustine writes of these coals, “For the coals of fire serve to burn, i.e., to bring anguish to his spirit, which is like the head of the soul, in which malice is burnt out when one is change for the better through repentance.” Jerome writes of those “softened by the fire of charity.” (both quotes from above mentioned *Concordia Commentary/Romans 9-12*, p. 1276).

We leave the payback to God, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” (vs 19) We think of the eternal payback but there is also divine payback in this life to those authorities entrusted with that task as we shall see in Romans 13.

No, God is not putting us on, He saves us in Jesus, smiled on us eternally. We are buried and raised with Christ in baptism. We have put on love that is not a put on love, but the real deal. Now we walk in that love. We bring the good news of that smile to those around us. For Jesus’ sake. Amen