

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23/Aug. 29, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, let me start off by asking you a question: Does it make a difference in your life to know that you are loved on the inside?

Does knowing that you are loved internally make a difference in what you do externally?

We have all heard that hurt people hurt people, right? But, do loved people love people?

That's always been my hypothesis. That because we are loved we love. We know we are loved on the inside and so it exudes from us to what we do in the world.

Knowing that we are loved on the inside directly impacts how we behave on the outside.

Would you agree with that or not?

I remember in high school when we would go to the Westminster Mall to hang out. There was this one jewelry store there that would give out "I am Loved" buttons. Does anyone remember that?

I don't remember what store it was, but if we could transport ourselves back to the 80s and the Westminster Mall, I could take you there and we could each pick up one of those buttons. I used to have one hanging around, but I'm not sure what happened to it.

But anyway, there was something magical about some stranger handing me a button that says – "I am Loved." Granted, it was a marketing campaign, and granted that person didn't love me. He or she didn't even know me, but getting that button was a good reminder that I was loved, and I'd have to say that it really put a spring in my step.

Just being reminded that I am a loved person made me more benevolent. Little things wouldn't irk me so much. My friends and I seemed to laugh a little more. It was a special thing.

Being reminded that I am loved made me more loving.

I can't imagine anyone with an "I am Loved" button on yelling at a cashier or pushing a kid out of their way, right? I am Loved becomes I am Love.

What is felt on the inside comes out on the outside.

As you may know, the class I'm in right now for my DMin is Spirituality and the Mystics. We started with Greg of Nyssa in the 5th Century and went all the way to discussing Luther in the 16th Century.

One of the questions my professor posed was – Was Luther a Mystic? And we had a lot of conversation about whether he was a mystic or if he just had mystical tendencies.

Luther himself would not have liked to have been called a mystic, although there were a bunch of German mystics that clearly influenced his theology.

I'm sure if you were to call Luther a mystic to his face he would likely deride you with some sort of insult. Luther didn't like the mystics, because he thought they just sat around and navel gazed. He thought they spent all of their time looking inside and that they never did anything on the outside, and that was true for some of them.

Most mystics were cloistered, so they didn't go out into the world. They worked internally to get as close to God as possible, but nearly all of the mystics we read didn't stop at their internal reflection. They did go out into the world to share the good news in some way – just look at St. Francis for example. He was part of the new movement of monks that left the cloister and preached good news in the town square.

Luther was all for getting out into the world, and not just with the clergy preaching. He wanted all people to live the gospel in their everyday lives. He didn't think contemplation was only for those locked up away from the world. For Luther, faith was for all people, and inner reflection wasn't the end of the story. Faith was meant to be lived in the world.

In the Middle Ages, it was thought that only religious people, that is clergy of some sort, were to be concerned about having a relationship with God. Lay people, that is non-clergy people, were just supposed to support the clergy in their endeavors and that would keep them from burning in purgatory for as long as if they hadn't. Hell and the flames of purgatory were always a big threat at that time.

But, Luther wanted people to know that they were loved by God. He didn't want anyone to live in the fear he lived in before he read the book of Romans for himself.

Before he read Romans, he felt hated internally. His parents didn't help much. Luther was abused severely by both of his parents.

As a damaged person on the inside, Luther struggled with ever feeling loved. He lived constantly in the fear of Hell and all he knew was the wrath of God.

After reading Romans, Luther was set free and he made it his goal to set all people free in the knowledge of God's love. That's why it is so important among Lutherans that people read the Bible for themselves.

But, it's not enough to just read the Bible. We also need to hear the good news that God loves us over and over again, because it's too easy to forget that we are actually loved – unconditionally loved.

Faith comes from hearing and we need to hear those words of God's love as often as possible so that we never fall into despair.

And, we also need to share those words with others. People need to hear it – as often as possible – at least every day.

That was the nice thing about a stranger handing me an “I am Loved” button. It was a reminder that God does love me, even if no one else does, and I think that makes a huge difference in the world.

The emotional things that we hold onto in the inside of us come out through our words and actions. So as Jesus says, the things that stain us are not the foods we eat, but the feelings we hold inside, especially those feelings that reflect what we think are true about ourselves, God, and the world.

Our theology, our belief system about God’s relationship with us, does make a difference in how we treat other people, and not just people but animals, and plants, and even rock formations too.

If we think God is full of wrath for us, we will cower in a corner and refuse to take a risk in helping someone else. If we think we are chosen and that God’s wrath is just for those other people, then we will be selfish and self-centered. But, if we know that we are loved, that God is love, and that God loves all of creation, then we totally act differently in the world.

We act as if we are one with God and one another. We live in a relationship grounded on care and concern for the other. We know that our lives are tangled up with everyone and everything else’s.

The true essence of God’s Law is love and relationship. God loves us and that loving relationship spills over into loving relationships with others.

God’s good news to us is that we are loved – plural we. Because we are loved, we love. Because we are loved, we care about the wellbeing of others.

And as we grow into God’s love, the more and more forgiving we become. Instead of being mad at someone who has sinned against us, we forgive them and offer them the good news of God’s grace.

We are forgiven, because we are loved. In love, we can look in the mirror and know that it’s not that we deserve to be forgiven, but that we are forgiven simply because God loves us.

With that in our hearts, we are able to forgive others and not do anything to hurt them in retaliation for what they might have done to us. Instead our goal is healing, not continuing the hurt.

Hurt people hurt people. But Jesus brings that to a firm ending by dying on the cross and taking all of the hurt of the world to the grave and then resurrecting us with him into eternal love.

So, when we are hurt, and we will be, because we are only human. We need only turn to Jesus and see him on the cross. When we take all of our hurts and turn them over to him, he will resurrect us to new life, and then send us out into the world as beloved people who are empowered to love other people – and all of creation.

Jesus' arms are outstretched completely, as far as they can go, so that he can take all of the hurts of the world into his wide open embrace. He is God's love and he can take all that we have to give him, so that while we are in the world we can be his presence in the world, sharing the good news of God's love with everyone we meet, even those who try to hurt us out of their own pain.

I am loved. We are loved. Through us the world is loved.

Loved people love people – all people and all of creation too.

Thanks be to God. Amen.