

John Sampson
"Lasting Fruit"
Text: John 15:9 - 17
Preached at KVCC
May 6, 2018

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

I had a whole sermon that I was going to preach today.

And it was a good sermon. At least I think it was.

But it was a sermon that was written for a different time.

A time before all of our power was knocked out. Before we lost our internet connections, before all of the food we've got in our refrigerators, and our freezers started to spoil. Before the electric chairs some of us use to get up the stairs in our homes started to run out of power. It was a sermon for a time when we had phones, and could pump gas.

I think today calls for another kind of sermon, a sermon that responds to where we are today.

I think today calls for a sermon about love, because I've seen a lot of it over the last 36 hours.

I often talk about love as a force of attraction, as a power that overcomes alienation and fragmentation. And I first got a sense that we are living in a time of deeper love when I woke up yesterday morning, and the power had been out all night, and I still was living under the fantasy that we might regain power at any moment, and I didn't want to open my refrigerator and let our any of the cold that remained. So Kevin and I went to the Noonmark diner.

And it was packed!

They still had power and could make food, and there were so many people there.

And many were there for the food, just like us. But many were there just to be around people, share stories, hear the status on when the power might be coming back. It wasn't good news, but we were together as a community. Yesterday morning the Noonmark was more than just a diner, it was a place where people could gather and overcome their feeling of isolation. It was a place of love.

And that was my experience throughout yesterday. Maybe it was yours too.

Maybe you kept running into people throughout the day, happy to see they were OK, happy to share stories and updates on the power, happy to share your disappointment that it was going to return later rather than sooner. Happy to share some space in your freezer that was running off a generator so that your neighbor could save some of their food. Happy to let people come over and charge their phones. All the time feeling a sense of connection and community. All the time experiencing a kind of love.

We had scheduled to have a concert here at the church last night.

The Open and Affirming Task Force had invited a singer songwriter named Bobby Jo Valentine to come and share his music. He was going to play his electric guitar. We were going to have a Cinco de Mayo themed potluck dinner. We were going to have a lighted sanctuary!

And then we lost the power, and there was a question whether or not the show would go on, as the saying goes.

Bobby Jo said he was in.

Debby said she thought we should go ahead.

Many of you said you were still on board.

And so the show went on – with some changes.

The stove in the kitchen runs on gas so we could use that to cook.

Bobby Jo shared his really heartfelt music on his acoustic guitar. And for lights we dragged out all those candles from Christmas and used them to light the VSR and then the sanctuary.

And it was a really wonderful evening of people coming together in a beautiful space lit by candlelight, with great food, and with community.

And there it was again. Love. The force that overcomes the space that separates us.

Jesus tells us that we are to love one another. He says this as a new commandment. And sometimes it can seem like following Jesus is hard. And at times it can be. But over the last 36 hours can't we see that it isn't that hard at all? That when push comes to shove that

loving one another, that connecting and looking out for one another, that supporting one another isn't necessarily that hard?

And that it isn't something that comes from outside of us, but something that arises from within us?

But Jesus challenges us to more than just love. He asks us to abide in love. He asks us to overcome our divisions and to remain there.

The latest report I saw online this morning was that NYSEG said they thought power would be restored to about 90% of customers by tomorrow evening. I also saw neighbors posting where they had seen power lines down all around our town, and throughout the area.

There's a lot of work still to be done.

And there is a lot of love we're still called on to show one another over the next 36 hours.

There's a lot of sharing and support we still need to offer and receive over the next day or two.

There's still a lot of isolation we need to break down until our power is back.

And this looks like we're just doing what we need to do in the face of a crisis. It may look like we're just being good neighbors. And we are.

But our tradition tells us that our response to this power outage shows what love looks like. This is the call that Jesus makes to us in our reading. This is what a reflection of God's kin-dom looks like.

So on this day with no power, and no hot showers, and no phone service, when some of us can feel alone and lonely go and love, and keep on loving. Give love and receive love. And do it today and tomorrow, and every day into the future because it's easy, and it's right, and it teaches us how things could be if we simply lived from our hearts.

AMEN.