

Sermon

September 9 and 10, 2006

James 2:1-10, 14-17

This is Rally Day (weekend).

The beginning of Sunday School for the fall.

I'm not sure why it's called Rally Day.

But it's a good day for new beginnings.

For focus on learning.

For emphasis on spiritual growth
and faith.

This year our theme for Rally Day
is "I Reflect God's Love".

I Reflect God's Love.

Which, of course,

since we are all part of the Body of Christ,

also means:

"You reflect God's love"

and

"We reflect God's love".

I reflect God's love.

If we are reflections of God's love,
where does that start.

It starts with God's love.

It starts with God loving us.

That is so important to me.

The life of faith

does not begin with our actions.

The life of faith

begins with God.

There is nothing to reflect

unless God first shines God's light on us.

When I get ready to come to church on Sunday mornings,

the rest of the household is usually still asleep.
Which is only fair,
since the rest of the week,
they're up first.

So, it's pretty dark as I get dressed.
I can look in the mirror all I want,
and it doesn't show me a thing,
because there's no light.

One Sunday morning I got to church,
and as I was walking around,
getting things set for the morning,
I looked down at my feet,
and realized that I had on one brown shoe and one black shoe.

I must have hustled home really quickly
to make it there,
get my feet to match,
and get back before 8:00 service.

The mirror needs the light.
If we are to be reflections of God's love,
the first thing that is needed
is God's love.

And I am so happy to say to you again and again and again:
I am convinced that there is nothing in all creation
that can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is good news.
That is the news we need to hear.
That is the light we reflect.

It starts with God's love.
Then "I reflect God's love".

We've had clothespins around the building
since our San Antonio National Youth Gathering trip.

We gave those away in San Antonio.
We've shared them here.

On our way to San Antonio,
we stayed overnight at a church in Dallas.
And after a day's service project,
we spent part of the late afternoon and evening,
writing messages on the clothespins
we were going to give away in San Antonio.

A lot of us
did what I did.
Figured out a short phrase that fit on the clothespin,
and repeated it 50 times
for each of the 50 clothespins we each had.
I think mine said,
"Jesus Loves You"
on one side
and something on the other side
letting them know we were from Manchester, MO.
I don't remember exactly.

Some of the youth
were much more creative.
Hannah Johnson, in particular,
kept coming up with different sayings
to write on each of her clothespins.
It was great.
I asked her for a couple of them,
because I liked them so much.

I have them here this morning.
This one focuses on John 3:16.
Those of you that know that verse,
would you say it with me.

"God so loved the world
that he gave his only son,
that whosoever believes in him

should not perish,
but have everlasting life.”

On one side of clothespin,
Hannah wrote,
“God so loved the world”.
On the other side,
she wrote,
“John 3:16–365”.

It all starts with God’s love.
John 3:16,
every day of the year.
It never runs out.
God’s love,
God’s grace,
is always there.

Then, on the next clothespin,
she wrote on one side:
WWJD.
Which stands for----what?
What would Jesus do?

And on the other side she wrote:
“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.”

I reflect God’s love.

Very nice.
It starts with God’s love.
Then, we reflect God’s love.

I’ve been watching for that pattern.
I encourage you to look for it as well.

In our baptism tonight (last night),

God welcomed Cade Jonathan as God's child.
And then,
we lit a candle
and said:
"Let your light so shine before others,
that they may see your good works
and glorify your Father in heaven."

God's love shines.
We reflect God's love.

At the 9:30 service,
with the special Rally Day focus,
we began the service with the song "Jesus Loves Me".
It starts with Jesus' love.
Then, we sang
"This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine."

The sequence is so important to me.
The book of James has always been problematic
for Martin Luther,
and for Lutherans.
One of the things I like best about the Lutheran church
is our emphasis on grace.
That salvation doesn't come through what we do,
but rather through God's grace alone
through faith.

So what do you do, then,
with a Bible verse that says:
"So faith by itself,
if it has no works,
is dead."

It only makes sense to me
when the sequence is right.
We don't earn God's grace by what we do.
But our lives of faith
are filled with works of love,

because God first loves us
and always loves us.

To me,
that's how James makes sense.

That's why,
as you look at Good Shepherd,
and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
and at Lutherans around the world,
you see a church focused on grace,
that gives of itself with generosity.

That reaches out to victims
of hurricanes,
and tsunamis,

and terrorism.

That reaches out to teach the young and old,
feed the poor,
and make a difference in the world.

God shines God's light on us.

But God's light is not meant to be kept to ourselves,
it's there to be shared.

We are created to reflect God's love.

And when we do,

we become more complete.

We become more of what God created us to be.

I like the picture of a candle.

When you share the light of a candle,
when you use one candle to light another,
what happens to the light of the first candle?

Is it gone?

Is it even diminished?

It's just as strong as it was.

And what happens to the light in the room?

It's brighter.

Because the light has been shared.

How would you like to have something

that you could give away
and still have it?

In fact,
you can give it away again and again and again
to your family,
to your friends,
even to your enemies,
and it just grows stronger.

That's what it's like to share God's love.
It's something we can give away
and still have.
And in giving it away,
the light of the world is stronger.

I reflect God's love.

Tomorrow is the 5th anniversary of the tragedy of 9/11.
It is a time to remember.
To grieve.
And I think,
as people of faith,
we need to keep asking the question:
"What does it mean for me
to reflect God's love?"
Starting at home,
and reaching out to all the world.

Jesus went to Tyre and Sidon and the Decapolis
to reach out to the Gentiles,
the non-Jewish people,
people like us.

How do we look beyond our borders
to reflect God's love to the world?
How do we care for one another,
providing safety for everyday life,
while also caring for the world?

I think that's something we,
as people of faith,
should continue to struggle with

in our post-9/11 world.

I encourage you,
in your small groups,
and Bible classes,
to wonder about that together.

I Reflect God's love.

Two weeks ago,
I drove Brent to college,
at Luther College, in Decorah, Iowa.
I helped him move his stuff into his room.
We made a run to the store,
stopped and had a hamburger.
He ran into a whole multitude of friends,
and quickly was back into his college world.
Which was fun to see.

And then it was time to go.
We said our goodbyes.
He started heading back toward his dorm and his friends.
And, knowing my love and God's love,
the last thing I said to him
before I drove away,
was a phrase we've been using with our boys
for a number of years now.

I said:
"Reflect your faith."

I say that to you.

God loves you.
Nothing will ever change that love.
Now,
reflect your faith.
Reflect God's love.

In Jesus' name,
Amen