

In the Name of Love
Oak Grove Presbyterian, Bill Chadwick
May 19, 2019

A four-part sermon: Jesus, love, transition, Jesus.

Gerhard Frost is one of my favorite poets. He was a professor at Luther Seminary for many years. This poem is called “What Shall I Say?”

*What shall I say when they come,
My sister, my brother in distress,
I who am mortal, and so fallible too?*

*Shall I say,
“Take a trip to the Grand Tetons,
Stop by their snow-fed streams,
Drink like a breast-fed babe
And try to taste God?”*

*Or
“Hold a puppy in your lap
And stroke its silken ears?”*

*No, not these foot notes,
Grace-filled as they may be. I’ll invite them to the
Headline—the Name:
“Jesus-Emmanuel (God with us)!
Whisper it, shout it, pray it.
Yes, cry it, cry out against it
If you must, but test it,
Taste it, experience how true it is,
How tough and how tender.*

*“Yes, come to him!”
That’s what I’ll say.*

(From *Seasons of a Lifetime*, p. 109)

That's what I say to you. I love nature as much as anyone. I am a literal tree-hugger. I thrill to cross-country ski across the pristine trails with sparkling snow-jewels dazzling like diamonds. Paddling in my kayak, gliding within ten feet of a momma loon with twin babies on her back is a mystical experience. But nature is not enough. Jesus. Jesus. Friends, read the gospels and then read them again, so that the message of Jesus soaks the synapses of your brain and seeps into your corpuscles and gives you a foundation to hang onto in this wild and woolly world. Jesus.

Second. Love. On Tuesday of this week I chose John 13—"Love one another"—as our key scripture for the sermon. On Wednesday, I discovered it was, in fact, the assigned lectionary gospel for today. Nice coincidence. God-incidence.

Jesus' new commandment to "Love one another as I have loved you," comes immediately following his washing of the disciples' feet, an enacted parable, upsetting the way things have always been done—no more servants and masters, but now "friends."

As the commentary from the SALT Video folks notes: *Accordingly, following Jesus' "new commandment" today means living out this dignifying, leveling, bridge-building love in our own lives and circumstances. When Pope Francis - in one of his first public acts as pope - (slide #7) washed and kissed the feet of twelve inmates at a youth prison on Maundy Thursday, including (for the first time in papal history) two women and two Muslims, he embodied this "new commandment" love in his context. So did Keshia Thomas. (At a Ku Klux Klan rally, opponents of the KKK staged an anti-Klan rally. At one point, they spotted a man with a Confederate flag t-shirt and an SS tattoo and started to attack him. Keshia Thomas, an African-American teen shielded him from the angry crowd.) (slide #8) Anyone today whose love helps knit a broken, divided world back together, stitch by stitch by stitch, (is following Jesus' new commandment). (slide #9 lily)*

Dear Ones, in the name and the power and the grace of Jesus, love this world on his behalf. I strongly encourage you to get up close and personal. I don't know many truly poor people, but I know a couple of them really well. And every time I am with them, they teach me about life, and love. Don't just give your money. Make friends with people living on the margins. As Father Greg Boyle, of *Tattoos on the Heart* fame, says, "We go to the margins that *we* might be healed."

Jesus. Love.

Now, third, let's talk about this transition.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart, for taking a chance on disproving the old saying, "You can't go home again." Thanks to Rich Miller for suggesting to the Pastor Nominating Committee that they take a look at me. Thanks to Rich also for his frequent interruptions of worship, comments designed to keep me humble.

Thanks to all of you for inspiring me. Instead of leading, I have often been trying to catch up. It has been an enormous privilege to serve this congregation, one of the most faithful, healthy, welcoming, courageous, cutting-edge congregations in the country. You are truly amazing. The planet so desperately needs the Oak Groves of the world.

This is a healthy, vibrant congregation, and we all get credit for that. Thirty-eight per cent of our current active membership has joined in the last ten years. We all get credit for that, along with the rainbow flag and electronic sign, two of our best church growth tools.

As I have looked back on my ten-year tenure, there are very few things for which I can take sole credit. You as a congregation accomplish so many, many things. I am so grateful for all the environmental steps you have implemented, all the courageous social justice stands you have taken, all the mission work you do and fund, the faith formation for all ages, music, deacons and on and on and on. I can take little credit for most of these except as #1 cheerleader.

Most of we do here has been a team effort, all of you and previous staff teammates Carol Osweiler and Dries Coetzee, Pat Wilson and Neil Greimel and Penny Nesbitt and Barb Phenicie and Karen Hill and Beth Hart-Andersen and Jake Van Pernis and Dawn Acker and Jermaine Ross Allam, and Nathan Hirsh and Meghan Dooley.

Current staff: Our new bookkeeper Anne Swenson is a wonderful addition to the staff. She knows her stuff inside and out. Lacey Jones and now Shannon Murray provide our nursery kids with love and safety. Custodians Tim Dubis and Martinalan Smith are always ready to do whatever needs doing, with smiles on their faces. Beth Angerhofer puts up with my last-minute changes to the bulletin or the newsletter, and she works through all kinds of personal physical ailments. She is a rock. And then Judy Cooper and Nancy Hauser....Church musicians have

a reputation among pastors as being difficult to work with. (Of course, I imagine that among church musicians, perhaps pastors have a reputation as being difficult to work with.) I don't need to tell you what a blessing Judy and Nancy are. Oh, my goodness. Just phenomenal. Their musical ability combined with their gracious spirits. Unsurpassed.

Finally, there's something about Mary. Mary Koon is Leslie Knope. (slide #10) The main character of Parks and Rec, played by Amy Poehler. She really is, and she is embarrassed when I say that because Mary agrees that there is no higher praise than to be Leslie Knope. (slide #11 lily) I used to sometimes joke that Mary pretty much carries me around here, so that I look competent. But no one ever laughed...because it was true, so I stopped saying that. It takes a person of secure ego to work with Mary because she does everything so very well, with so much creativity and compassion and energy. No offense to my dear pastor friends that are here today, but I have to say that Mary is the finest all-around pastor I know.

The one thing that she is absolutely no good at is self-care. So you need to work with her on that.

I do have a long history here. Five of the eleven charter members of Oak Grove back in 1855 were Chadwicks, including my great-grandparents. My great-grandfather and namesake, William Chadwick, was the first person to be kicked out of the church. He missed too many communion services, which were only held four times a year.

I was baptized here 66 years ago, confirmed 53 years ago, ordained a ruling elder here 46 years ago, ordained a teaching elder here almost 42 years ago. Memorial services were held here for my great-grandparents, my grandparents, my dad and my mom and three siblings.

Having grown up here, it has been a unique situation in many ways to serve as pastor. After I'd been here a few months, Laretta Racer came up to me after worship one day, placed her hands on my shoulders, looked me straight in the face and said, "My son's high school friend is now my senior pastor. That is sooooo weird." Being a son of the congregation has made officiating at memorial services so very precious to me, as well as painful—over 100 dear saints, my Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders and parents of my childhood friends. At one point, following yet another memorial service, Karyn Arazi commented, "Bill, you are definitely the right person at the right time for Oak Grove." I believe that was true.

But now it's time for someone different. As we have noted a number of times, the Church seems to go through a great upheaval every 500 years or so. Clearly, we are in a new Reformation period now. You need someone from a different generation who can help you discern the Spirit's leading in this new era. There are things left undone. Several programs that Mary and I have talked about implementing and we just didn't have time and energy. There are always dozens of people on our "to call" list that we don't get to. I ask your forgiveness. In my exit interview, I recommended to the Personnel Committee that you hire a part-time calling pastor.

I used to think to myself that I would know it was time to retire when I no longer had the energy to run up the steps at Fairview Southdale two at a time. Well, I still can. I did Friday, on my way to see Phil Hall. But I now have to stretch for a few minutes first, which kind of defeats the purpose.

Speaking of energy, that reminds me of a story. I just have to share this. It sounds like I'm bragging, but wait until I'm done. Back in 1986, my mom went through cursillo, a weekend of spiritual growth. Women go one weekend and men the next. Some of you have been through cursillo. At my mom's weekend were women from Oak Grove, from Stillwater, my first church, from LeSueur, where I had done an interim pastorate, and from People's Congregational, the church which I was then serving. About the middle of the second day of the cursillo weekend, there was a group of women sitting around chatting during break time. A young woman from the Le Sueur congregation, where I had recently been the interim pastor, noticed my mom's nametag, "Roberta Chadwick. Are you related to Bill Chadwick?"

"Yes, that's my son."

"Oh, Roberta, we just loved Bill during his time at our church. He brought so much energy and life to our little congregation. Why, he was only there nine months and we had five new babies in the nursery." This young woman had no idea why my mom turned bright red and everyone else was doubled over in laughter. It *was* a busy first week.

Well, don't get me started on stories.

In my first sermon among you, I said that at the end of my time here, if you say, "Isn't Bill wonderful!" then I will have failed. If you say, "Isn't Jesus wonderful!" and "I can do it," then I will have been a success. Yes, we have had a good run.

Many of you are sad to see me go. ALL of you are sad to see Kris go. But the church is so much more than the pastor. In my very first church, First Pres of Stillwater, the first summer I was there, there was a little party after worship for a woman who had been a member for 50 years. (I know that's nothing around here.) Doris Rice. At the end of the party, she said to me—I was 24 at the time—"Bill, I don't worry about what you guys (referring to pastors, and at that time they all were 'guys') do or say. I've been here fifty years. Ministers come. Ministers go. The church goes on."

The Apostle Paul said essentially the same thing to the church at Corinth. He writes: Some of you say, "I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.'" There's only one right answer there. "I belong to Christ."

A few people have said, "I don't know what I'm going to do after you leave." Well, let me tell you what to do: Show up, pitch in, pray, support the transitional pastor and Mary and all the staff. Give generously. Be the Church! If you stay away after I leave, you will dishonor my ministry.

So, thank you for your love and support and encouragement.

Thanks for upholding my family during the deaths of my beloved siblings, Cal and Mary. Thanks for praying for us. Thanks for today, for all the work by Sandy Crum and Jane Propsom and Jane Jacobson and Mary Koon and so many others.

I love you with all my heart.

Finally, if you remember nothing else from my time here, remember this, the final message of Jesus: Love wins.

Amen? Amen!