



November 24, 2019

Sermon Series: Seeking Stability in a World of Change

Practicing Love No Matter the Cost
Pastor Lisa Kipp

Peter 4:7-19 NRSV

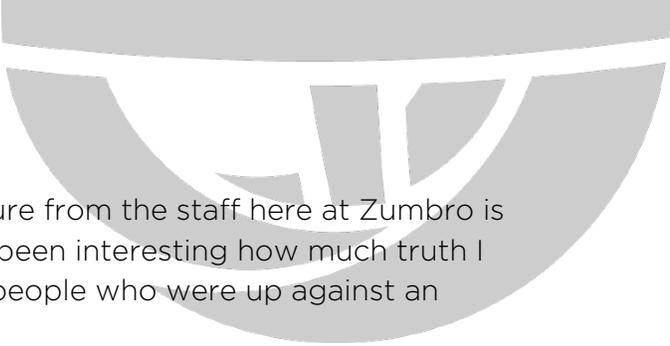
⁷The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief-maker. ¹⁶Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name. ¹⁷For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸And "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?"

¹⁹Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

So what do you do when your world is about to change? A couple of weeks ago, Pastor Jason pointed out God's uncanny sense of humor as we launched into this sermon series about seeking stability in a time of change. I suppose you could say that God's humorous timing strikes again, as this week's Bible reading (assigned to me weeks before I accepted a new call to Lutheran World Relief) begins with this: "The end of all things is near."



Now let me be clear, I do not believe that my departure from the staff here at Zumbro is anything reflective of the end of all things, but it has been interesting how much truth I have been able to glean from this letter written to a people who were up against an unknown immediate future.

While there is a lot that we don't know about the setting of the world for which 1 Peter was written, we do know times were hard for these Christians. The culture was changing, and life as they knew it once before was no longer. This was a book written for real people facing real crises. While the context may be different, and the trials aren't necessarily the same, chapter 4 offers some real, practical advice with a sense of clarity that transcends time and culture.

This morning, I want you to think about a challenge, or a change, or stress, that you are facing in your own life right now. I'm not going to ask you to share it with anyone else, but I want you to personally identify something. Maybe it's a parenting dilemma, or a vocational crisis, or grief, or the loss of an ability, or a disagreement with a loved one. Whatever it is, I want you to hang on to it, and imagine what it might look like if you were to apply the advice of chapter 4 to your life. But here's something important. I don't think the author is offering up ways to find solutions to our problems, but I hear him offering two solid nuggets of wisdom that can help guide us as we make our way through change or challenging times. Here's what they are:

- 1) Above all else, practice love for one another, and
- 2) Do so from your own unique giftedness

That second nugget comes straight from verse 10, "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." There's something about this advice that sounds equally holy and practical. So often we get in the midst of a challenging time and our ability to gain perspective on the situation is lost, yet there's something about looking outwards and practicing love ... and doing it from deep within ourselves ... that helps to keep us grounded. Practicing love turns our gaze to the world beyond ourselves. Practicing love serves our neighbor. And practicing love brings glory to God.

This advice can be received and practiced both individually throughout whatever you are experiencing, and as a collective community of faith. Zumbro will be in it's own time of change as the calendar turns to 2020. Installation of the new elevator should begin in January, eventually worship will be moved downstairs to the gym, and there will certainly be conversations about how best to configure the staff as needs are identified moving forward. What if in the midst of all of that, we clung to the advice of 1 Peter - identifying Zumbro's own unique gifts and from that place, practicing love for one another?





The mission title is already laying the groundwork and paving the way for this to happen ... and it couldn't be timelier in our community. I was struck by yesterday's Post Bulletin. Not one, not two, but three front page headlines were related to those experiencing homelessness in our community. Take a look at them yourself:

“Rochester homeless numbers rise”

“Housing for homeless project sees \$8M in state support”

“Chafoulias wants homeless out of skyways”

Perhaps the truest statement I read in these articles was this: “Homelessness is a complex problem and there are seldom simple solutions to complex problems.”

It just so happens that this past Wednesday evening, Zumbro's Director of Mission, Sarah Lichty, and I finished teaching a five-week confirmation unit on homelessness. I'll be honest, when we first started planning for the unit, I thought that five weeks was going to be far too long for these 8th graders to spend time thinking about homelessness and our calling as Christians to practice love. But I was wrong. We needed the time to try to understand the systemic problems in our society, to explore what our own community is doing to reach out with compassion, and to identify how and why we might practice loving these neighbors. Our students were engaged. And they care. But hands down our most powerful class was this past week when our students met Acacia.

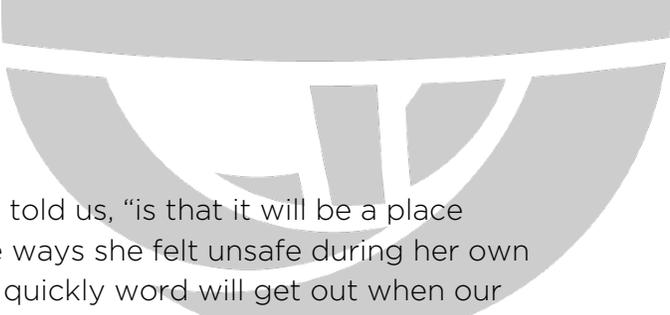
Acacia is the young woman wearing the yellow sweater pictured here with some of our 8th graders. She's given me permission to share her story. Quite a few years ago, Acacia was a student just down the street at Friedell Middle School, but by age 16 she was a high school drop-out, and by age 18 she was homeless.

Acacia bravely and thoughtfully answered our young people's questions about what it was like to experience homelessness during MN winters. She survived, she told us, by working overnights for Charter so that she would be safe while it was dark and cold out, and then during the days she found refuge at the old Barnes & Noble downtown, or the public library, or in friends' homes.

One day, Acacia opened up to a friend of a friend, “letting her story out,” as she put it. The friend listened to her, and said, “There's a program that can probably help you.” The program Acacia was being referred to was Lutheran Social Services' youth services here in Rochester. And they did help her. Acacia became connected with an LSS caseworker who eventually helped her find housing and get her back into school. She attended LSS classes that taught her independent living skills. And now Acacia serves on their youth leadership council.



But all throughout our frank conversation with Acacia, she kept coming back to what she believes is needed in our community – a youth drop-in center. As you likely recall, partnering with LSS to open a youth drop-in center for young people like Acacia is one of



our plans for the mission tithe. “My first thought,” she told us, “is that it will be a place where youth can be safe,” as she told us about all the ways she felt unsafe during her own experience while homeless. Acacia talked about how quickly word will get out when our center opens. “It will become known,” she said. “If youth need something, they’ll know to come here, and because of this location downtown they will be able to get here. Sometimes kids just can’t face their burdens at school, and this place could give young people an opportunity to better themselves.”

Over a year ago, we set out to “explore our identity as a downtown church” in 2019. I don’t think any of us had the idea of a drop-in center for youth experiencing homelessness in the back of our minds. But one conversation has led to another, and to another. That’s often how God tends to work. And because of your commitment to this capital campaign, tentative plans are in place to consider opening the center in a limited capacity next fall. It will be a time of change around here ... and what better time to really practice love from the basement corridor of our building, tucked into downtown Rochester?

1 Peter was written for people experiencing a challenging time ... but in the midst of that it is one of the most hope-filled books of the New Testament, because all of its message is undergirded by the hope we know from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Because we know Jesus, we know that from death comes new life. Because we know Jesus, we know that what could be seen as the end of all things, can also be transformed into the beginning of something beautiful.

Acacia knows a little bit about what this transformation looks like. Because of LSS and from within her own deep sense of resiliency, once a high school drop-out, Acacia now has an associate’s degree. She’s taking a break from school to pay down the student loans from this first college degree, but as she does she’s raising her two kids, working full-time, living in secure housing, and taking steps toward her dream of becoming a social worker.

Dear friends, in the midst of whatever change or challenge you’re enduring ... practice love, do it from your own giftedness ... and trust that the God of hope will work in and through you to make all things new. Amen.

