

2015 Summer Sermon Series (Inspiring Songs of *Fresh-Brewed Faith!*)

“Nothing More” (The Alternate Routes)

By Rev. James C. Ramsey; East Union Presbyterian Church

Note: Blessing of the Animals and Outdoor Worship!

Texts: Leviticus 19:18
Galatians 5:13-15

Preached: 7/12/15

Our Summer sermon series has been highlighting songs presented during Spring Youth Sunday School Class, called Fresh-Brewed faith. We've explored a mixture styles and genres. This morning we lift up a contemporary song titled “Nothing More” by the band The Alternate Routes. Scottie Mundy shared the song with our teens. Unfortunately Scottie has been working on Sundays so has to miss worship. He'll read the text of my sermon on the East Union Church website this week.

Before Scottie introduced me to this song, I had never heard of it or the band that sings it. The song has a simple melody with common sense lyrics and a straight-forward message. We've printed the words in your Christian Caller – if you want to follow along.

Here is: “Nothing More:”

Nothing More

Sung by The Alternate Routes

To be humble, to be kind,
It is the giving of the peace in your mind.
To a stranger, to a friend...
To give in such a way that has no end.

Chorus:

We are love,
We are one,
We are how we treat each other when the day is done.
We are peace,
We are war,
We are how we treat each other and nothing more.

To be bold, to be brave;
It is the thinking that the heart can still be saved.
And the darkness can come quick;
The Danger's in the Anger and the hanging on to it.
Chorus

Tell me what it is that you see
A world that's filled with endless possibilities?
Heroes don't look they used to, they look like you do.
Chorus

Wow, this song really gets right to it, doesn't it? Right to the heart of the Gospel... Right to Jesus' summation of God's law – You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength – AND You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

We are how we treat each other. I wish it was more complex than that, flashier than that, easier than that! But there it is. How do you treat your spouse, your sister, your parents, your friend and neighbor? How do you treat the fellow members of your church? Do you think of their needs and feelings? Or are you so consumed with your own, that the other's never enter your mind? Are you tired? Or bored? Too tired or bored to go the extra mile...or even the extra inch...so that someone else might feel cared for, uplifted, encouraged, helped? Are your words loving? Are your ears and heart open? Are we willing to really listen to each other?

Or do we go about our minutes and our hours refusing to listen, unwilling to entertain any perspective but our own? Do you consider, in every instance, in any instance...what is the loving thing?...what does love require?...how can I salvage this conflict?...how can I traverse this distance between us?...how can my words or my actions uplift this person?

When Scottie addressed our youth, his message was "I am third." God first -- Others second -- himself third.

It's a holy life philosophy. We read from the ancient scriptural text LEVITICUS earlier...familiar words on God's own lips, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

We know Jesus' own summation of God's Law -- the great and first commandment: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.* And a second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

We tend to think of holy things as stuff we find in church -- perhaps the holiest things we do are practice the sacraments...gathering around the font for baptism -- or breaking the bread and pouring the cup at the Lord's Supper. We experience God in a substantive way when we celebrate these.

But the great theologian of the 20th century, C.S. Lewis suggested:
(in "The Weight of Glory")

Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor, he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also, Christ ... is truly hidden.

What if we were aware enough...with it enough...holy enough to embrace Jesus' notion that whatever we do to the least of these -- we do also to Jesus?

Maybe there really is NOTHING MORE we need to do to love and serve God. I wonder if we don't make things too complicated. Love your neighbor -- it only takes practice and persistence. You could even practice on your pets or the animals you encounter -- for after all, they are neighbors, too!

THERE IS AN OLD SAYING: "YOU CAN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND ANOTHER PERSON'S EXPERIENCE UNTIL YOU'VE WALKED A MILE IN THEIR SHOES." My friend in college, Mike Popp, extended this to his dog, an Australian shepherd named "Laser." I have never met a dog who was as obedient as Laser. I always assumed Laser must have gone through years of classes with Mike. They went everywhere together. Laser would sometimes wander off, but one word from Mike and Laser was right back by his side. We used to float fish the Little Muskingum River in Ohio and Laser would come with us. Mike would put him out on shore and Laser would disappear into the woods on his various dog adventures. We would drift miles through dense forest. Hours would go by. Yet all Mike needed to do was call out and Laser would come bolting through the underbrush and stand at attention on the river's edge. If Mike thought Laser was tired, he would invite him into the boat and Laser would lay down and sleep.

I asked Mike how he trained his dog. And Mike explained that never once did they take a class. No formal training. He simply said, we've walked miles in each other's shoes. When Mike first got Laser -- they went out into the woods and lived alone for four months. Mike was a hunting guide in Idaho and Montana, and so had the freedom to take off into the wilderness -- just him and his dog, relying on each other, learning the other's ways, coming to love and respect each other's quirks and idiosyncrasies. Mike loved Laser like he loved himself. It all came from learning to tolerate each other -- NOTHING MORE.

We'll give thanks for our animals today. Ask God to bless them. They are certainly our neighbors. Our treatment of our neighbors -- all of them -- people and animal -- is a holy thing -- drawing us closer to God. We are how we treat each other. Heroes look like us, when we are bold and brave in our love for one another!