

Pastor Charley Reeb:

Well, hello there. It's Pastor Charlie Reeb from Johns Creek United Methodist Church. We're so glad that you've joined us for worship remotely. Thank you for connecting with us. I know this is a special time for many of you and we do appreciate you taking time to worship with us. A couple of things I want to lift up before I pray. First of all, we appreciate all of you who have turned in your pledge cards for our stewardship campaign. We want 2021 to be a thriving year for this church. And so if you've turned one in, thank you. If you have not, we ask you to do that as soon as you can. We appreciate that. Also, remember that today we have two worship services at 8:45 and 11:00 AM and hopefully those of you who are coming have registered. But we'll be offering that each week, an 8:45 inside worship service in the sanctuary, at 11 o'clock outside on the soccer fields.

And again, you have to register for that each week and of course, we'll continue to offer remote worship. Let's be an attitude of prayer together. Lord, we do thank you for this time of worship. We thank you for the ways you continue to work in our lives. We are grateful for that. And now, Lord, I'm grateful for this privilege you've given to me of preaching your word to these, my friends and your servants. A task that I don't take lightly, a task that quite honestly Lord, I'm humble by. And so Lord, I ask you to speak to me and through me in such a way that all of us do receive a word from you that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Did you know that Harvard University once revoked their acceptance of 10 incoming students because of inappropriate content they posted on Facebook and social media? Actually, the description of Harvard College class official Facebook group states this, "Harvard College reserves the right to withdraw an offer of admission and if an admitted student engages in behavior, that brings into question his or her honesty, maturity, or moral character." And a recent study showed that over 40% of colleges and universities actually take a look at the social media pages of possible students and they often make decisions whether or not to accept them based upon what they see. Now, I have to say, considering this election, if churches adopted that kind of policy for their members, there are many, many Christians whose membership to their churches would be revoked. Now, I'm not saying that the churches around should adopt those kinds of policies, but I am saying this, I am sick and tired of the ugliness that Christians throw around during this election time.

I'm sick and tired of the hate and the division. I mean, I expect that in the world in general, but for Christians to do that, for Christians to participate in that kind of behavior on social media, on Facebook in front of each other, it's just not acceptable. Quite honestly, we have to protect our character. We have to protect our witness. And so quite honestly, I think the church of Jesus Christ right now needs a come to Jesus message, which is what I want to do today. I think all of us would do well to have a come to Jesus message right about now.

I think that's what James had in mind when he said this. James chapter five verses eight and nine, be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door. Jesus is watching us and how we behave. Now, most of you know, I'm not the kind of preacher that likes to instill fear in people and say things like, God is watching us. Jesus is watching us. But you know what? Every once in a while we need to hear that. Jesus is watching our behavior as Christians. He's watching our witness in the midst of this election time, he's watching us, what are we doing. A pastor wants a member of his congregation to get up on the platform with him and he filled a glass with water and he handed the man a glass of water and he kept on preaching.

And as the preacher preached, he flailed his arms and he bumped the man with the water. Water spilled everywhere and spilled all over the pastor. And the pastor turned to the man and said, why'd you spill water on me? And the man said, well, because you bumped me. No, why did you spill water on me?

Because you bumped me. He said, no, no, no. Why did you spill water on me and not orange juice or coffee or coke? And the man replied, well, that's what you put in the glass. Then the pastor turned to the congregation and said this, life sooner or later is going to bump us around in some way. And what's inside of us is going to spill out, what do you want to spill out of you? Hate or love? Meanness or kindness, fear or confidence? What do you want to reveal?

I'll tell you folks that pastor was right. Life has a way of revealing what we're made of, especially right now during these tumultuous times. It bumps us around and what is spilling out of us? What do you want to reveal? Well, the Bible is quite clear of what should spill out of us as Christ's followers. In fact we find it in Galatians chapter five, very concrete, very clear. The Bible states this is what should spill out of us as Christ's followers, but the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As followers of Jesus Christ who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, these are the things according to scripture that we should reveal. That should be coming up from inside of us. But of course, if we make bad choices, make bad character choices, fill our stuff with other things, well then other things will spill out.

Now, I know some of you watched Sesame Street growing up. Remember the character Oscar the Grouch? Always insulting people, always having a bad attitude. As they say, garbage in, garbage out, right? Well, what's interesting is how Oscar, the Grouch got his name. Jim Henson, of course, who's the director of Sesame Street. Early on in the program would meet with the other directors at the same Manhattan restaurant every week, called Oscar's Tavern. And every time they would meet, they would have the same grouchy, mean, rude waiter. And so they decided to immortalize the meanness of that waiter forever in the character of Oscar the Grouch.

Do you know anyone like that? Do you know anyone who's mean or grouchy? Talk about memorable in a bad way. They're no fun to be around. And I tell you, it seems like there are more and more grouchy people around me today. Fortune Magazine published an article with a list of some actual lines that people had written in resumes and cover letters. Listen to this, it's best for employers that I not work with people. Would you want to hire that person? Listen to this one. I have become completely paranoid, trusting no one and absolutely nothing. Wow. Here's another one. Note, please don't misconstrue my previous 14 jobs as job hopping. I have never quit a job. Does that mean he was fired for 14 jobs? Or how about this one. The company made me a scapegoat just like my three previous employers did. Now, I don't know about you, but if I was a person seeking an employee and receive these kinds of letters and resumes, I would take them and I would throw them right in the trash. And instead I would look for those who exuded these particular qualities.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Ever been around somebody who exudes these qualities? I mean, they totally make your day, don't they? They can sometimes make your week. No, I have to brag on my wife Brandy a little bit. Brandy has one of these great personalities, these great sense of kindness and love. Brandy exudes these qualities all the time. She's a great example for me. In fact, the other day we were at a restaurant and we sat down and we noticed there was only one waitress for seven or eight tables. We learned later that some of the other waiters and waitresses hadn't shown up to work yet. And so she was running around frantic, trying to please everybody on all the tables. And when she finally got to our table, there was Brandy with her effervescent spirit, acting very loving and kind. And saying, I bet today is really busy for you, huh?

And the waitress said, you have no idea. And Brandy said, well, look, take your time. Don't worry about us. Just do what you got to do. She said, thank you. Well fast-forward toward the end of our meal, and the waitress came and brought us our check. And Brandy said something and the waitress replied, thank you so much for being nice to me because you were nice to me, I thought, you know what? I'll be nice to you. And that waitress, her disposition completely changed because of the way my wife, Brandy

interacted with her. It's amazing the difference people make in your life when they exude the fruits of the spirit. Do you know anybody like that? Do you realize the difference it makes? And the truth is, as Christians, we have a choice as the kind of qualities we will exude.

We have a choice whether or not we're going to reflect the fruits of the spirit. In fact, it is the fruit of the spirit because if we claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, that means we have the Holy Spirit living and breathing inside of us. Which means it is the very spirit of God within us that is empowering us and wanting to help us exude these particular qualities. And do we reveal those? Do people see those qualities in us? You know the famous Irish tenor, Ronan Tynan had both legs amputated from the knee down after a motorcycle accident. How would you respond to a tragedy like that? Well, I'll tell you how Tynan responded. He became a wonderful medical doctor, a great athlete, and a famous tenor.

In fact, he was such a great athlete that he participated in the Paralympics and he won a bunch of medals and he also became an equestrian. He became a great master rider of a horse and he had these special boots, these special legs that were artificial that they gave to him when he rode horses. And one time a reporter asked Tynan, how tall are you, really? You know what he said? I'm adjustable. Don't you love that? I love it. He said, I'm adjustable. Now, timing had a choice as to how he would respond to such a tragedy of such tribulation. Many of us would've chosen to be grouches the rest of our lives, but instead, Tynan knew he had a choice as the kind of attitude he would embrace, as the kind of the qualities he would exude, as the kind of person he would become. Let me ask you something. Does your faith make you adjustable to life? Because if there's one quality you need to be a growing Christian in this troubling world, it is to be adjustable.

When someone is mean to you, do you respond with the same meanness or are you kind instead? When life throws you all kinds of difficulty, do you have a bad attitude or are you faithful knowing that God's going to redeem your suffering? When someone betrays you, do you turn around and betray them? Or instead, do you forgive them as God has forgiven you? Are you adjustable? There's a reason why Paul puts love at the top of the list of the fruits of the spirit. He lists love first because it is love, a particular kind of love that opens up the rest of the fruits of the spirit. But it's not just a regular love that we throw around, it's a particular kind of love. In the Old Testament, it's called hesed. In the New Testament, it's called agape. And what is that kind of love?

It is sacrificial love. It is unconditional love. It is love that looks for the best in another person and wants what is best for another person, regardless of what they've done or regardless of how we may feel about that person. It is a love that bears all things and believes all things. It is the greatest love in the world. It is the kind of love used to describe the unbelievable love of Almighty God. Agape is love in action. That's why when the apostle Paul in scripture talks about this love, Paul uses action words. Love is patient. Love is kind. It is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It believes all things. It bears all things. It hopes all things. In other words, this love is not something we as Christians talk about or think about.

It's something we do. But what's also implied in agape love is this. And some of you may not know this. It's a love that chooses to love despite how we may feel. Now, right feelings may come after we choose to love, but when we love the way God calls us to love with the agape love, we choose to love how we may... Instead of loving in a way that is artificial, instead of being dictated by what another person does and everything the same mean feelings as another person. No. Instead, we choose to love despite how we may feel. That means when someone cuts us off in traffic, we let them through patiently instead of waving them a particular finger.

That means when we're in the grocery store and there's an old elderly couple getting in our way and we're in a rush to get things. Instead of pushing aside and being angry, that means we're patient and we think, you know what? We have no idea what that couple has gone through today. Maybe they just

came from the doctor and they got a bad pathology report, and who knows what they're going through. Maybe these are the last precious moments. It means at the end of the day when you want to go home from work and it's after five o'clock and you're so tired.

But yeah, there's this coworker and maybe is a little annoying but is in pain and needs someone in their life. You stay and you listen. That means when someone betrays you, you forgive them despite how you may feel. It means when you come across someone on Facebook or in your life who voted for a different presidential candidate than you, you are loving. You are kind. You are patient. You are gentle despite how you may feel. Now, let me do a side sermon during this sermon right now because we as Christians need to hear this.

No matter who wins this election, this coming Tuesday, God will still be on the throne. Jesus will still be Lord. And there will still be people in this world who are hungering to see the light of Christ in our lives. And I tell you this, one of the greatest opportunities to witness to this world that what we believe is true and is genuine is how we respond, is our attitude on Wednesday morning. If the particular person we voted for wins, are you going to gloat or are you going to be humble? If your particular presidential candidate loses, are you going to be angry and hateful? Are you going to be loving and kind? The world is watching us. Jesus is watching us.

Do we really believe this stuff? How we respond to this election is going to show this world whether or not we believe that God is still on the throne, and we believe all this stuff about Jesus's love. Agape love, it is the most powerful love in the world. It is the acid test of whether or not we're followers of Jesus Christ. Because the central thrust of Jesus' teaching is that unconditional love wins and forgiveness, overthrows evil. And if we don't believe that, we're just another charity organization. Think about it. What makes us different? Because you know a lot of charity organizations and nonprofits can do what the church does, and in fact, does what the church does.

The Christian Church has programs and outreach, so do many other nonprofits and charities. The church has a creed. Well, so do different clubs and organizations like Kiwanis and Rotary, they have creeds. We sing songs. Well, so do other social clubs and other clubs in the world that want to do good. What sets us apart? What makes us different? I'll tell you what makes us different. It is our ability to love unconditionally in this world. It is our ability to forgive people who have wronged us. It is our ability to see everyone as a child of God despite what they've done. That's what sets us apart, our ability to embody agape love, to be that light. I'll tell you folks, the greatness of our faith is our expansive spirit of love, that overthrows resentments, that forgives people, that shuts down evil, that embraces rivals and does what is best for every person. That's the greatness of our faith. That is the power of the cross. We need to hear this over and over again. We need to remember this especially.

Now, let me bring this down to a personal level, because as Christians, we can accept what I'm saying perhaps on a general level, on a cognitive level, on an intellectual level. But let me ask you this. What about our personal relationships? Where does the rubber meet the road or does it with the love I'm talking about today? The great preacher James Moore talks about the time he went to visit an older member of his congregation, an older lady in the hospital. She was in her eighties and she wasn't doing well. And while Moore was visiting, her son showed up. He had flown in from another state and he walked in and Moore observed this whole interaction.

The son was so moved by his mother's condition because she was so weak that he knelt down and he took her hand and said, mama, you were the best mother. I love you so much. And the mother started to tear up and she looked up at her son and she said, you know what, son? That's the first time I've ever heard you say that you love me. You're over 50 years old and that's the first time you've ever told me that. And Moore stood there stunned thinking it took him over 50 years to tell his mother that he loved

her. What about you? When was the last time you shared with your spouse, your children, your family, your friends, that you love them, that you care about them?

You need to do it now because you may not have tomorrow to do it, and they might not have tomorrow to hear it. When was the last time? But let me push you a little further and especially get into this idea of sacrificial love, of forgiving love, the love of Christ. Are you estranged from anyone? Has someone betrayed you? Have you been holding on to resentment and it's choking you? Don't forget what Christ calls us to do, to forgive. And it's not like, well, when they apologize and when they come to me, maybe I'll forgive. No, no, no, no. Is that what Jesus said, that Jesus wait for us? No. Jesus took the first step, and that's what we're called to do as well. And you have no idea how transforming that forgiving love can be. You have no idea. It probably will heal you and it just might heal the person you forgive. That's how powerful the love of God is. You know Leo Buscaglia was a famous writer and speaker for many years.

And I believe I've told this story before, but it bears repeating. For a long time, he was on the speaking circuit. He would travel all over the world speaking on one topic, and that is love. And he said that the fun of those events were not the big crowds that showed up or me speaking. He said the great fun of those events, the transforming part of those events, he said was after the event. After I spoke and I would stand down below the platform and people would come talk to me. And he said, I was always overwhelmed as to how many people just wanted me to hug them. He said, I was always overwhelmed when I heard people say that they had not been hugged in years, they had not been loved in years. And he said they would walk away from that event looking like new people. The unconditional, sacrificial, transforming love of God does that to people. It changes you. You can conquer anything. That's why Paul said, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

I remember after my dad died. I missed my father's love. I really did. And I recall, I would come and visit my mom here in Atlanta when I was in college, and I would just miss my dad and his love so much. And of course, during that time, I would reconnect with Bill Self and I would often go and hear and preach when he was up here at Johns Creek Baptist. And he knew me well. He'd known me since I was a kid and he knew my life. He knew about my dad. And invariably, every time I would come see him, he would seek me out and he would invite me to do the benediction after the end of the service. I was always overwhelmed by that.

And then before I left, he would always tell me that he loved me. And I'll tell you this, I would live on those words for weeks. For weeks, I would leave the church feeling like I was walking on air because he told me that he loved me. The love of God is powerful. The love of God always wins. This is the essence of our faith. Jesus summed it up. The world will know you're my followers, not by your political party, not by how you worship, not by how you baptized, not by your sophisticated theology but how you love. Oh, how we need to learn this lesson. And I'm coming in for a landing here. I can't tell you how many people that have come across the threshold of my office over the years, well, who I've visited, who regret not learning this lesson earlier. They talk about the time wasted on resentment, the time and anger wasted on arguments, the money and time wasted on trivial pursuits and needless things, and they are desperate.

They wish they could turn back the clock. I've done a lot of funerals. You know what I've never heard said at a funeral? I've never heard anyone get up. I've never said it. I've never heard a pastor say it. I've never heard a friend who's eulogizing say it, say anything about what's in the deceased person's bank account or the cars they owned or the boats they owned, or the houses they owned. I never heard anyone talk about the deceased person's golf handicap. You know what they do talk about always, without fail? The way that person loved. That's what is lasting. So let me ask you this. What's going to be said at your funeral? What's the pastor going to say when he or she gets up?

This transcript was exported on Apr 05, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

And then later during the reception when everybody's eating potato salad and talking about you, what are they going to talk about? Well, let me tell you this. They're not going to talk about what so many of us are worried about right now, whatever it may be. They're going to talk about how you love them, how you treated them. They're going to talk about your light and your witness. These three remain, faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love. Let's pray. Oh Lord, draw us back to you during these crazy times when we lose our way, when we lose our minds. When we let anger and opinions take over our hearts. Oh Lord, forgive us. We ask for your forgiveness. And we ask that you would empower us by your spirit to exude the fruits of your spirit, to remind us that love is the highest law. And if we don't get that right, we have missed the point. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.