

Sermon on July 26, 2020 by Pastor Hanberry, Weaving of the Future, Part 1
– Based on the New Identity, Mission, Vision and Values Statement and
Romans 8.26-39 (Ser20-30)

The Interim Planning Team is pleased and proud to share the new Identity, Mission, Vision and Values Statements. See the brochure included with the worship materials for the week of July 20, 2020. I encourage you to read the brochure, in its completeness and in its intentionality. These are not just words on a page. They are the deep, deep desires and convictions of the eight members of the Interim Planning Team and the Consistory of Trinity UCC. The members of the Interim Planning Team are: Marge Bailey, MB Brainerd, Leslie Brooks, Lorne Haines, Belva LaMotte, Robert Miller, Jackie Nave and Doug Rhoten. After careful review and discussion, the Consistory of the church affirmed these statements. Five of the eight members of the Interim Planning Team are also on the consistory. The other members are: Karen Haines, Deb Miller, and Sue Myers.

Over the next three Sundays, I will address these statements of intent for the future in worship and in my sermons. This first Sunday of this three-part series titled, "Weaving of the Future," I will focus on the overall process and visionary intent of the Identity, Mission, Vision and Values statements.

The last of the nine values says, as a definition of the Value (**Bible as the Foundation of our Faith**) *"We read, study and pray Scripture, the testimony, and reflections of God's people, in order to walk closer with God and become the people God wants us to be."* That is indeed an aspect of our life together that we cherish, that we hold dear: The study and reflection of the sacred scriptures of our Bible. Flip back a moment to the first of our nine values and you find in the scripture from Matthew 22:3-39 being lifted up as the root and branches of our commitment to God...to love God: *"You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all you mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

With those two values as book ends for the other seven, with those two values and the beginning and the end, we can then say with all our hearts that our mission is: **To love people where they are and encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.** In so many ways, one might ask, "What more is there to say?" That says it all. But there is always more to say and God, Jesus Christ, and our life together in the faith.

Given our scripture lesson for today in Romans when Paul says in the end of that text these words: ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see, my friends, whether it be the love of God in us touching others or the love of Christ through others touching us, there are moments in our lives when it seems as if heaven reaches down and touches us in the most unexpected ways." And it is in such a moment that we experience and share the miracle of the love of Jesus Christ. My friends, that is our mission; that is our fundamental reason for being...for being this church...for being disciples of Jesus Christ. **To love people where they are and encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.**

"Can I pray for you?" she asked. This question stopped me right in my tracks as I was leaving that hospital room at Johns Hopkins University Hospital. I guess I was startled for just a second. After all, I was the pastor who had come to visit her. This woman, whose battle with cancer had led her into a deeper love of God, was looking to eternity. Oxygen flowed through a nose tube; antibiotics through IV's. As we had talked about what happens after death; we had prayed. I had as lovingly as I could, led her in prayer. And when I had finished praying for her, I was ready to leave; my work for the moment ended. That's when she looked at me and asked, "Can I pray for you?"

My friends, there are moments when heaven touches the earth in the most unexpected ways, and the love of God shines warm upon us, and we return that love. It is then that we experience another ministry miracle in our lives.

Let me say quickly three things about what I think best characterizes a disciple's response to this commandment of Jesus: **The response of love is, first, attitude.** There is an attitude in love, isn't there? The attitude of love is grateful self-giving. When we are captured by love, we respond from our hearts-and we want to give back. That's what happened in that hospital room. That time of prayer had ushered that saint into the conscious presence of God's love, and her response was to give back, and as I had prayed for her, her desire was to pray for me.

The second response of love is always practice. Have you ever noticed that real love, the kind of love that stands the test of time, is translated from deep feelings to everyday habits? Boys and girls here this morning, did you know that the love of your parents for you is translated in their desire to protect and guide you? These are practices of love. Men and woman, if you are or have been in a relationship that was planted deeply in love, you'll know that it was maintained by the less than glamorous practices of phone calls when you were running late, cleaning up after they got sick and getting the car to the garage on time. Real love's response includes daily practices, doesn't it?

Third, love's response is communicated in nearness. Lovers can't stand to be separated-so they talk endlessly on the phone or share countless cups of coffee and conversation, or put love notes in each other's lunch. Love requires a nearness from us if it is real. God's love invites us into the response of nearness with God too.

One writer says, "The spiritual truth is that love of God always draws us in love toward others." I read this this week: "This is a dangerous God we worship." I thought, "yeah, maybe that's why we are so reluctant to allow God's love to really touch us, maybe that's why we wait for someone else to get involved in the ministries of this church. "When Jesus comes into your life, my life, he brings others with him. In the book of 1 John we read "those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. This commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also" (1 John 4:20-21). What is "mission" if not simply the love of God turned outward in action? No wonder Jesus teaches us in our text that ". the second (commandment) is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:31). This is our mission in these days: **To love people where they are and encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.** Thanks be to God. Amen.