Colossians 3:12-17

February 14

“The Ways of Love”

During pandemic my wife and I have discovered the television series ***“Man With a Plan.”*** It is interesting for us to *watch as a couple* as the plot revolves around *the marriage of the main characters*. Everyone else who matters is connected in some way to them. There are ways in which it reminds us of “Frasier” – where we used to ***squirm in our seats*** as he made mistakes and self-destructed before our very eyes. Recently, while watching Man with a plan, I found myself *talking to the television*. Perhaps you know someone who does that. The main character’s wife had suggested they not bother to get each other anything for Valentine’s day. I had a visceral reaction and yelled, ***“Don’t do it! Don’t believe her! You’ll be sorry.”*** (Pause) It’s hard not to like a show where you turn out to be right.

It is *always a bad idea*, even if given permission, **to take a pass on expressing love**: for all of us. The chance to *encourage a child* can be a seed which grows for years. The chance to be *gracious* when we have been offended can soften bitterness and promote relationship. ***Some things are just worth doing.***

Our passage today is a treasure trove of **things worth doing**. It is such a *wonderful combination of spiritual guidance and practicality,*  I have used this passage in **wedding services.** It has lots of **practical ways** for us *to live out love* in our lives. This is not simply *“good advice”* – As Alan Serman taught us, “Good advice costs nothing – and its worth the price.” Each life giving choice is *rooted in God who loves us.*

It is easy – in fact, sometimes a bit lazy – to **assume our personal viewpoints and opinions are the measure of all things**. Back in the enlightenment it was said that human beings are the measure of all things. Today, many of us have boiled that down to*, “I am the measure of all things.”*  If you don’t agree with me, you aren’t simply wrong – you are also wicked and dangerous. It appears to be a natural human reflex. But we are counseled in our passage today **that this easy way is not the way of God** – our lives are meant to be **rooted in and grow out of belonging to God** *– belonging to God together*.

*Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience* – these are the practices of life as God’s children. And we hear the voice in each of us complain, ***“That’s too hard and not at all practical in a harsh and difficult world”***. As if reading our thoughts, the author of Colossians continues, *“Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are to forgive.”* Friends**, God** is not surprised this can be a hard knock life – we are. Our faith offers us ***the God given response*** to the hard knock life instead of giving up on it: something other than rushing up the nuclear ladder in conflict. *Our faith offers us connection with God who* ***has an easier time guiding us and being known*** *in our community when we* **practice compassion, are kind, are comfortable with who we are without having to Lord it over someone else, and can shift to wait for God’s good time when we were in a hurry.**

The caricature of the Christian faith today is that we are *narrow minded, self-righteous and don’t know how to have fun. May it never be so!*  Our author points us in the way **of joy and thanksgiving, happy wisdom and glorious singing.** This is not only something our better selves aspire to – it also describes the kind of people we want as our neighbors. //// Choosing how we live – **not by** deciding what **others deserve** – but by how the God who dwells in us *directs us* is all about **living in love.** On February 14th we remember a saint whose dedication to love is all we remember about him. And you know, maybe that’s enough – maybe **living out the ways of love is all we really need.**