

## The Love Shack

John 13:33-39

Tomorrow is Valentine's Day. It seems like a fitting time to talk about love. In particular, it seems like a fitting time to talk about our new tagline. Over the course of two days, one in November and one in January, board members got together to talk about and come up with our Mission, our Vision, and a tagline. I'm pleased with what the board came up with. Here is our new mission and vision statement. Why don't we read them together:

### MISSION STATEMENT:

*Wall Street United Church  
provides a Spirit-filled and Christ-centered refuge  
with love and hope for ALL.*

### VISION STATEMENT:

*Growing relationships with God and ALL people through worship and outreach.*

And then there's the tag line. If you don't know what a tag line is, it's that little sentence or couple of words that in a very memorable way sums up what an organization is about.

Think about Wal-Mart's: **Save money. Live better** slogan,  
or KFC's **Finger lickin' good**.

Here are a few more memorable tag lines.

Secret Deodorant: **Strong enough for a man, but made for a woman;**

Maxwell House: **Good to the last drop.**

Generally taglines are short and punchy, but there are always exceptions to the rule. MasterCard has one of the longer ones but it is also one of the best known:

***There are some things that money can't buy. For everything else there's MasterCard.***

My favourite one belongs to the US Peace Corps:

***The toughest job you'll ever love.***

You could use that one for being a disciple of Jesus. It's quite a difficult thing to do, to sum up what you are about in a short space. But the idea is that people will remember you easily and understand quickly what you are about.

So this is the tagline that the board came up with:

***God loves ALL. So do we.***

When we were brainstorming and putting together the tag line, one of the questions that came up was: but is it true? The first sentence is probably a little less sticky but even there, is it true that God loves all? Does God love the mass murderer, does God love the abuser? The answer is yes. One of the things we like most to do as humans is to put as much distance as possible between us and *them*. Our *Recorder and Times* newspaper runs a "Dear Amy" column and the stories are always a little out there. I figure the reason that people enjoy reading them and the reason that we enjoy watching some of these far out reality shows like Hoarders is that we can sit back and say, I might be bad, but I'm not *that* bad. Thank God I'm not like that!

The Bible says that *all* have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. I don't think there was any person who was willing to be reached that Jesus would not have reached out to, no matter how bad they were. Think of the suffering inflicted on ordinary struggling families by a greedy tax collector where people could be thrown in prison or sold as slaves if they couldn't pay up. Nevertheless Jesus ate with tax collectors, and encouraged them to follow him. Think of the messed-up woman with 5 previous husbands and no friends. I'm guessing she wasn't that easy to get along with. But Jesus met her at the well and gave her living water. Think of the murderer on the cross next to Jesus. We know very little about his crime, but we can be pretty sure

there were friends and family members who were grieving the loss of his victim. And we also know that he is with Jesus in paradise. God loves ALL.

There is a story about Martin Niemöller. He was a German Lutheran Bishop during World War II and during Nazi Germany. At first he was a supporter of Hitler. He believed that his election would bring revival to Germany. On a few occasions early on he actually met with Hitler, mostly to talk about the German Church and to gain assurances from Hitler that were later completely disregarded. It was not long before he realized that Hitler was not the leader he initially thought he would be. Niemöller, along with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth, founded the Confessing Churches. This was a group of Protestant Churches who opposed the Nazification of the church and vehemently opposed the anti-Jewish stance of the Nazi party. Niemöller was imprisoned for his beliefs and sent to a concentration camp from which he was eventually liberated. For the remainder of his life, he worked for peace and reconciliation.

But towards the end of his life, Niemöller was haunted by a recurring dream. In the dream he saw Hitler standing before Jesus on Judgement Day. In the dream, Jesus gets off his throne puts his arm around Hitler and says "Adolph! Why did you do the ugly, evil things you did? Why were you so cruel?" Hitler with his head bent low, simply answered, "Because no one ever told me how much you loved me". At that point in the dream the Bishop would always wake up in a cold sweat and he would remember that never in his meetings with Hitler did he ever say to him: "By the way, Führer, Jesus loves you! He loves you more than you will ever know. He loved you so much he died for you. Do you know that?" It was "just" a dream. But it makes you wonder if history might have been different if he'd only known, if he'd only been told. Yes, Jesus loves all.

So what about the second part of the tagline? God loves ALL. *So do we.* I think "so do we" ...the second part of the tagline is what we struggled with more than the first part. It's fine to say that God loves everyone, I mean after all God is God, but isn't it a bit audacious and perhaps even a lie to say that we do too? Audacious, yes. A lie, no.

Let me start by reminding you what loving isn't. Loving isn't the same thing as *liking* someone. We are all different and we are drawn to some people more than others. We admire some people more than others. If music is a passion for you, the chances are good you're going to enjoy most other people who also love music. We have a lot of different people in this church from all kinds of different backgrounds with all kinds of different likes and dislikes. It is only natural that you like some people and that there are others that you don't much like at all. Jesus did not command us to 'like one another' and that is a big relief. He commanded us to love one another.

Doug preached about Forgiveness last week. (His message is on the back table and the web if you missed it). Love and forgiveness walk hand in hand. And just the same way that forgiving someone doesn't mean that what they did was Ok, so too loving someone does not mean that you support everything they stand for or do. We often say around here: *God loves you just the way you are, but he loves you too much to leave you there.* Don't wait for someone to be perfect or near perfect *or more like you* before you are willing to say "Jesus loves you and so do I". We are called to see what God sees when he looks at a person. We are called to look past the labels, past the addictions, past the incredibly annoying habits or grumpy behaviour and see the potential that God sees in a person. We are called to see what God imagined when he created this person. And friends, if you want to see someone get better and be better, the best way is by sharing the love that Jesus gives us to share.

Dr. Tony Campolo is a well known evangelical speaker and retired professor of theology and sociology. He tells the story of a time when the phone rang at 10 o'clock at night. When he answered it, there was a woman on the line who wanted to know if we were judged by Jesus right after we die, or if we are all judged together at the end times. Tony took a deep breath. It had been a long day and answering a deep theological question at 10 o'clock was the last thing he felt like doing. But he went through the complicated answer. To make a long story short, Campolo believes that we are all judged at the end of time together. When he was finished answering he said: "Friend, I don't know how you got my number, but I need to ask you a question. Why are you calling a tired man with such a heavy question at this hour of the night?" The woman paused then answered him. "Sir, my homosexual son committed suicide three weeks ago, and when he stands before the judgement seat, I just want to be next to him and try to tell Jesus what a good and loving boy he was".

I don't believe she will need to do that. I believe Jesus will already be there, standing beside him himself. He died for her son and for each of us: for all of our

brokenness, for all our pain and for all the pain and hurt that we have inflicted on others. That's the kind of love we are called to: the love of a grieving mother, the love of God's only Son. We are called to stand next to ALL people, but especially hurting people, and to say to the world: 'You might see only a drug addict, a widow, a welfare bum, an uptight perfectionist, a tired old man, a smoker, a negative complainer, a fat slob, a cripple... but this is what I see... I see a great story teller, I see a generous heart, an artist, a wonderful grandfather, a great listener... I see a beautiful child of God.'

There's a little bit of scripture that I noticed and I've been thinking about, in 1 Samuel at the beginning of chapter 22. David, who is not yet king, is in hiding because King Saul is starting to lose it a little bit and he's feeling very threatened by David. So David hides in the cave of Adullam. Listen to verse 2. "Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Those who were with him numbered about four hundred." This cave not only became a refuge for David but for many, many others who for one reason or another needed a refuge. It doesn't sound like David turned anyone away. Eventually David took this strange and motley crew and by the grace of God, turned them into a mighty army. We are called to be that cave at Adullam. This Church is called to be God's love shack. Ok...it ain't exactly a shack, but I thought it was a good title. ☺ We are called to be a refuge for all— a place where people feel loved enough and safe enough to heal and to grow into the people that God created them to be. If we love one another, as Jesus commands us to do, then together, by the grace of God, and through the power of his Holy Spirit, we will do mighty things. We will bring hope to the lost, light to the darkness, justice to the oppressed, joy to the despairing and life --- real, abundant, full life --- to everyone who wants it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.