

Rev. Janet R. Doyle

Elmer Presbyterian Church

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, June 21, 2026

Scripture Lesson: Luke 15: 11-24; James 2: 1-13

Sermon: The Gift of Love

A Sunday School teacher was teaching a lesson for the day about Noah's Ark, so she decided to get her small pupils involved by playing a game in which they identified animals. She said to her students, "I'm going to describe something to you. Let's see if you can guess what it is. First, I'm furry with a bushy tail and I like to climb trees." The children looked at her blankly. "I also like to eat nuts, especially acorns." No response. This wasn't going well at all! "I'm usually brown or gray, but sometimes I can be black or red." Desperate, the teacher turned to a perky four year old who was usually good about coming up with answers. "Michelle, what do you think?"

Michelle looked hesitantly at her classmates and replied, "Well, I know the answer has to be Jesus, but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me!"

The funny part of this is that at church when you ask children a question they think the answer has to be "Jesus". Children take us back to the basics because many times the answer is "Jesus".

It is like the book, "Everything I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten." It is true in many ways. We learn about life and death from our parents and by the age of Kindergarten we have learned a lot about life.

Studies highlight two vital windows for parental influence: ages 0 to 5 for foundational brain architecture, and ages 8 to 14 for behavioral and social navigation. Both stages are critical, but they serve entirely different developmental functions. From ages 0 to 5 is a Foundational Growth time. The first five years are paramount for physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Concerning brain development research has found that up to 90% of a child's brain development occurs before kindergarten. Neural pathways are rapidly formed based on daily experiences and interactions. Warm, emotionally supportive parenting during these years directly correlates to future academic success, intrinsic motivation, and

lifelong emotional regulation. Many children in our world are not developing in a healthy way during the first five years of life and we can see the outcome in our schools and in our prisons.

One of the sayings is that we learn how to treat people by the time we are in Kindergarten and how to behave with others.

Our scripture lesson in James is teaching us about this basic point. How do we treat others? The basic, fundamental rule of life- loving others and treating them as you would like to be treated.

The law of neighbor love is hard to keep because we find strong reasons for caring for some people while rejecting others. We are partial and prejudiced, and we play favorites in life.

James left no doubt about what he meant by partiality in his command, "My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." (2:1)

Immediately he illustrated the attitude that was to be avoided. The man who is dressed fine sits while the one dressed more poorly stands over there. How do we see people as adults? Do we look at the outside and judge the person even before we know who they are on the inside?

There was a story on Facebook about a little boy who wanted to dress up for "Twin Day" at school with his friend. His mother bought two shirts that were exactly alike. One was for her son and the other for his friend. When she saw the picture the teacher took on "Twin Day" her son's friend was a boy of color while her son was Caucasian. Her son didn't see color—her son saw his friend, his twin.

Rebecca Pippert is a Christian woman who worked with a Christian organization called IntersVarsity Christian Fellowship that works on college campuses around the world. She spoke around the country and has written a couple of books. She has a book called Out of the Salt Shaker and into the World.

She tells a story about a young man she knew during college in the 1980's. He was a brilliant young man but he had long hair and never wore shoes and dressed very casually. He was searching about the meaning of life and what it meant to follow Jesus and he decided to go to church one Sunday. The church he chose was a very formal church and everyone was very well dressed. He walks in with no tie, no jacket, and no shoes and his

long hair. The church was crowded by the time he got there and there was no room in any pew so the young man walked down the center aisle and sat down in the very front of the church not in a pew but on the floor. Everyone wondered who he was and gasped at what he was doing. Suddenly one of the ushers an elderly man walking with a cane, came down the center aisle.

Everyone was probably thinking, “Good, he will tell him to leave or not to sit there.” Then as the elderly man reached the young man all eyes were upon them and the elderly man carefully sat down next to the young man on the floor for the whole service. Everyone couldn’t believe what they saw. What they saw was the Gospel in action. What they saw was love and open arms being extended to this young man who looked different than others there, but yet he needed to be there just as much as all of those in suits and ties.

The pastor stood up and said to the congregation, “You will probably not remember much about what I say today, but you will never forget what you saw here today.” How that young man was accepted that day could determine his eternity.

Back to the basics of loving your neighbor in the name of Jesus. Jesus is the answer. Jesus sees the heart!

We must follow Jesus’ own example of how he treated people. Jesus did not look to a certain crowd and only help them. In fact, there is much evidence that Jesus leaned over backwards to reach out to people who were demeaned and rejected and the outcasts of society— he ate with tax collectors and sinners. He showed all people respect and love and forgiveness.

James is saying, “treat everyone the same— show love to all people.” When we look on the inside of the person and not the outside then we are responding to people in a Christ like manner.

When we show others love and hospitality we are telling them that we care about them as a person.

Hospitality is an important ingredient in our lives as believers in Jesus Christ—the one who showed care and concern for all people.

It is essential for each one of us in this church family to see our ministry to share Christ as one beginning with hospitality and showing love to all people—to bless those that we meet.

Hospitality is different from entertaining. Entertaining is to impress and hospitality is to bless those God has you meet.

Hospitality is serving another and demonstrating to your guests the role of Jesus as servant, in the fact that Jesus came to serve and not to be served.

Jesus' sign of hospitality, of serving others, was the basin and the towel as he washed his disciples' feet declaring "I have given you an example." (John 13:15)

We must carry the basin and the towel always ready to serve and be an example to others of God's love and care for them.

Hospitality and showing love to another is the foundational layer for people to be welcomed into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus knew that sharing and getting to know others starts with a meal. Bonding begins to happen when you feel at home with others sharing a common meal. Jesus went to people's homes to get to know them and to share his message to the lost and hungry world—hungry spiritually.

People were shocked at who Jesus ate with and shared a meal with, but when he ate with them their lives were never the same.

Jesus' last time with his disciples wasn't a formal classroom with the disciples in chairs taking notes. Jesus' spent his last night with his disciples around a table sharing the Passover, sharing the bread—telling them that his body was to be broken for us and the Cup—his blood shed for us, for the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus showed his disciples how to love by doing. Jesus showed his disciples how to sit and eat with others. Jesus showed them how important the other person is.

To wash their feet, to invite them to rest, and to feed them the bread of life.

Today as we celebrate Fathers and the gift men are to our world, to our communities, to our homes and to our church we want to celebrate the gift of a Father's love and those who have become like Father's to us. The

gift of love from our earthly father and the gift of love from our Heavenly Father.

The scripture lesson about the prodigal son is about the love our Heavenly Father has for us and the forgiveness and the open arms of love that are for all of us. The father welcomes home the son that ran off and throws a party for him. The father waited for his son to come home. Our Heavenly Father waits for all of us to realize how much we really need the gift of his love. Whether we had a loving earthly father we have a loving Heavenly Father that greets us with open arms and runs to us.

God wants us to know we are loved and know that we can be forgiven and changed and made into new creations. When you have experienced the love and forgiveness of God and the love of another person, life is never the same.

When you have experienced another's hospitality and generosity how has it made you feel? Special, and loved by that person right?

Well, God wants us to show love to each other.

Our world is in need of love.

God wants his house filled.

God wants us to be generous people—overflowing with the gift of his love.

May all who enter into your home and into our church home feel welcomed and loved because God invites us to sit in his presence and feel his peace.