

Sunday – October 16, 2011  
Pastor – Kitrina Team  
Sermon – **Love**

St. Matthias UMC  
Fredericksburg, Va 22405  
[www.stmathiasumc.org](http://www.stmathiasumc.org)

Scripture: **Matthew 24:31-46**

While in Mississippi, a devotion was done every day at breakfast, which is shared with all the people there, and at lunchtime, which was with just our team. MATTHEW 25:31-46 is a familiar passage that touched the hearts of those leading the devotions and was used several times during the week. As Pastor Walt described a couple of weeks ago, when he used it as a basis for his sermon, the focus of this parable is that we should love EVERY person and serve ANYONE we can. Such love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for him.

For those who wish to follow along, it is page 29 in the blue Bible and page 27 in the red Bible.

Listen to the word of God for you today.

### **READ MATTHEW**

The word of God for the people of God. *Thanks be to God.*

Let us center ourselves in a moment of prayer.

May the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be formed by your grace. For you are our Lord, our rock, and our redeemer. Amen

Our final trip to Mississippi was as fulfilling as the first one. There was lots of laughter, eating, fellowship, eating, driving, eating, worshipping, eating, working hard, eating, learning new skills, eating, getting to know each other, eating, and did I mention the great food and eating? Just check out the Facebook pictures from the first couple of days—all of them centered around eating.

The work assignment on our jobsite was to fill large holes in the exterior walls with plywood and patch in the siding, do some carpentry work inside the framed rooms, insulate the inside, do some magic to put trim on the outside of the windows that were replaced, and scrape paint, prime, and repaint the entire exterior of the house from top to bottom.

We got to meet our homeowner, Leta Ferrington, on our last day, which for many of us was the icing on the cake for the week. She has been displaced from her home for over 6 years and the unbelievable story she shared about her and her husband's survival during the hurricane touched our hearts.

The house was built in the 1940s to house the naval personnel stationed in Pascagoula, MS, during the war. It is a simple two bedroom house built on a concrete slab and is located about ¼ of a mile from the gulf. They stayed in their house during the storm and watched the water rise into the ditch, then the front yard, then the front door, at which point she went into the bathroom to get some towels to put in front of the door. As she was leaving the bathroom the tub, sink, and toilet literally blew up behind her. By the time they opened the door to head up the street to higher ground, the water had started its surge and poured into their house. Mr. Ferrington was handicapped and had to walk with a cane and the going was slow through waist deep rushing water and rain. He fell and went under a couple of times. She shared on the third time he went down, she prayed to Jesus for strength and was able to pick him up out of the water and pull him along. He responded with, “Woah, baby.” She told him, “It was the Lord, not me.”

As they were wadding up the street, a yacht literally came floating by them, to which Mr. Ferrington said, “Honey, our ship has come in.” Just as she was beginning to give up hope, they saw two men across a street at a higher elevation who helped her and Mr. Ferrington across the street to a shelter at a church. Unfortunately, he had a heart attack that night and they had to get him to the hospital. Even more unfortunate, he died 5 months later, never really recovering.

After the storm, she drug flood-soaked filthy furniture out into the front yard, and for several days she slept on the couch in the front yard until someone took her in. Since then, she has been moving from house to house staying with people waiting for her own house to be done. The reaction and the look on her face when she saw how much had been done on her house brought tears to our eyes.

Last year our focus was “where did we see HOPE during the week.” This year the assignment was to observe where we saw LOVE during the week. Many saw love in the same places, but I’d like to share their individual observations with you.

**(Barry)** Saw love in the fact that the St Matthias group worked hard and worked conscientiously and worked diligently all week on the house for someone we did not know and had not met until just before we left. We did what we did out of love for someone in need, even though we did not know them.

**(Ben)** Found love with a special group of people who took a few short buses (aka cars) on a long journey. Fast friends they found, and over many meals shared between an ample amount of manual labor formed memories that will not be quickly forgotten. He found love in the subtle support, helping hands, and friendly smiles of all the friends and family that made a good trip truly memorable.

For **(Dianne)** love was all around us. Sunday, when we attended church in Alabama, you could feel God’s extravagant love. The pastor so warm and welcoming—the prayer after communion

was dedicated to **our** mission, service, and safety. The prayers of the congregation—their love for their family, friends, and yes, strangers.

*(SIDE BAR: Each year when we have driven down, we select a Methodist church along the way on Sunday morning. But this church was the friendliest little country church. During the passing of the peace, they wanted hugs rather than handshakes because they'd never hugged anyone from Virginia before. It was communion Sunday and they discretely had someone go fill more cups so they would have enough to serve us also.)*

Dianne's observations continue: Arriving at Vancleave UMC, hearing Dee's story of her past two weeks--Jack (her husband's) two major surgeries in those two weeks, plus her work with the Katrina mission – showed us her deep love for her husband and those who had been seriously affected by Hurricane Katrina 6 years ago. Marie and Marie have shown their love for their neighbors – fixing breakfast every morning, five days a week, for six years. What a blessing these two ladies are!

At meals, you could see the love between husband and wife. When his wife came through the door, he jumped up and got her her morning cup of coffee. Pulling out her chair seems like such a small thing, but again his love showed through his actions. His reassuring hug and gentle smile were like sunshine. They brightened the day.

There was a visible love between a father and son – with loving, gentle touches on his shoulder, the father said, I love you, son. While patiently teaching his son a new skill, he showed us all a father's love.

The love between team members was constantly present with encouraging smiles, helpful hands, and lifting each other up when experiences did not match skills.

Yes, love was all around us. God blessed us with the opportunity to help our homeowner come a bit closer to getting back in her home after 6 years. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to see, feel, and celebrate Gods' love.

**(Jim)** saw love in the members of Vancleave UMC and Mount Pleasant UMC. These people have worked non-stop for 6 years to support volunteers coming to Mississippi to work on houses. The church members are there every day of every week cooking wonderful meals, praying, sharing devotions, anything that is needed. They are doing this to support their neighbors – some in neighborhoods they wouldn't normally be concerned about. Yet, when people think of who is rebuilding Mississippi they think of the volunteers who come from far away working on the construction of the house buildings, not the local church members who are giving the spirit of a home to the Mississippi Gulf Region. It is sort of like the church building is not the church--the people are. The local church members are the silent unknown support.

I saw love in the people at St. Paul UMC outside of Greenville, AL. They seemed so happy that we came to their church. They were so friendly and talkative. It was like we were returning friends. The Pastor was so excited about our mission that he met us at Krystals (it's a southern hamburger restaurant). I think he expects an impact on his church. I know there was an impact on us. That may be the most important part of our trip.

I saw love in the kindness of the St Matthias team members. They were full of joy and happiness.

I saw love every time I reached into my pocket and felt the wooden cross St. Matthias gave me at the commissioning service. I thought of the many years and friends at St. Matthias.

For **(Kathy)** there were numerous possible answers to this question, but the one that came into her mind most quickly would have to be—the two Marie's during the breakfast hour Monday—Friday of our week in Mississippi. It's not like we haven't seen it every year, but for some reason it was particularly special this year. Perhaps I am feeling sort of sentimental, knowing there is a high likelihood this will be our last trip to Vancleave, and we will never see most of the special people we have gotten to know there again, at least in this lifetime.

The love of these two women for the Lord, their families, the people of Mississippi, and the hundreds or maybe thousands of servants like us who have passed through Camp Hope comes shining through. We have experienced both the delicious breakfast food prepared by them and the spiritual food served to us through their morning devotions. How can that not be considered love?

**(Kristi)** shares it was out of love that our group went down to Vancleave to help rebuild a life for a hurricane victim. Love was the focal point of the trip, it was out of love all of the volunteers were there. The greatest love I saw was between a father and a son who were working together towards a common good. I also think it takes a great deal of love for two people to shape their entire lives for an undetermined amount of time around this tragedy. Dee and Jack Boring have tremendous hearts and resolve to have kept this operation going for 6 years. All of the volunteers, from the cooks to the folks who came in and washed the linens show love for their neighbors by devoting their time on a daily and weekly basis.

**(Mary Ella)** found love in so many places and faces and ways on this trip that it would be hard to narrow it down to one. Love was overflowing in the hugs and smiles and greetings of the folks and the Pastor of St. Paul's UMC in Greenville, AL, as they sent us on our way to Mississippi. I felt our trip was blessed by their good wishes to us, and I KNOW they were delighted that we worshipped with them.

Love is evidenced by the banners in the dining room at Camp Hope, showing the hundreds of thousands of servant hours given by so many caring folks. I have never looked at those banners and not been deeply moved.

Perhaps most profound for me is the love shown by all of the folks who make Camp Hope work: Jack and Dee Boring, the Maries, Steve, Lois, et.al., who are case workers and provide the supplies to the people working; all of those good, dear folks who come in day after day and cook and share and wash sheets and towels, and ask only to be able to serve the Lord and their neighbors without fanfare or kudos or anything except the knowledge that they are doing what the Lord has called them to do. While we servants go down for a week at a time, they have been there serving for 6 years without fail, their endless energy fueled by their faith. Whew! THAT is love!

I also have to say that I found love in and for my new St. Matthias family; what joy to spend a week with all of them, and to truly become a family member! I know the Lord led me to the right church, and I'm happy to be one of you!

**(Peg)** Where did I see love? Since it would be our last year down there, on the last day we took a drive down memory lane and drove by some of the houses we worked on over the years. But every year since our first trip down to the Gulf Coast when we worked on Ms. Dora and her brother Big John's house, we have stopped by to visit them just to see how they are getting along and to say hello. This year's stop was bittersweet because it would be our last. Ms. Dora whose eyesight is failing has done well over the years. She has expanded her little house and most recently added on a nice screened in front porch. She said she had been quite busy recently going places and was really concerned she may have missed our yearly visit with her. Sadly she shared with us that John, who had Downs Syndrome, died in April. As we were leaving, she especially wanted us to let the man who gave Big John a football on our first trip down there know about his passing. That man was Bob Dixon. We will always have that connection of love with Ms. Dora and the other residents whose homes and lives we have helped rebuild over the past 6 years.

Love was and is everywhere. I was curious how many times "Love" is used in the Bible. The answer is anywhere from 310 (in the King James version) to 551 (in the New International Version). This does not include any derivations such as loves, loved, beloved, etc. Some well-known passages about Love are: I Corinthians 13 (the Love chapter as Dianne read earlier); John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..."; Romans 8:35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"; Romans 13:10, "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law"; and Luke 10:27, the Great Commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and **Love your neighbor as yourself.**"

Love is a universal language. To illustrate this point, in 1967, the Beatles were asked to come up with a song containing a simple message to be understood by all nationalities. “It was an inspired song and they really wanted to give the world a message,” said Brian Epstein. “The nice thing about it is that it cannot be misinterpreted. It is a clear message saying that love is everything.”

His words can be used to describe what God did for us over 2000 years ago. He too wanted to give the world a message. It cannot be misinterpreted in any language; it clearly says love IS everything. This is the message we are anticipating and waiting to come to us on Christmas morning in the form of one small child (as the choir sang). We receive this message with joy, knowing God wrapped it in love and sealed it with grace. This is the message that is given to us anew every day and in every place. This message is a symbol of the Giver’s love and brings joy and wonder to the receiver.

That simple message written by Lennon and McCartney in 1967 and sent by God over 2000 years ago says it all, **(HOLD UP CROSS)** “All you need is love, love, love is all you need.”

So be it.

I’d like to close with a prayer that was shared by the new pastor of Vancleave UMC, Sally Bevell, during her devotion. It was written and sent to her by a college student.

### **LET US PRAY**

Dear God,

How can I want a big house when so many in the world have no shelter?

How can I complain about the lack of variety when one child every five seconds dies from hunger-related causes?

How can I allow myself to feel down when so many struggle with the extreme pain of mental illness?

How can I consider getting an iPad or some other gadget when so many battle to survive?

How can I be annoyed by a noisy neighbor when there are those at risk in war zones?

How can I be content in my faith when so many do not have a personal relationship with Christ?

So what am I going to do about it?

I completely commit myself to doing all I can to alleviate poverty, to support those struggling with mental illness, to love generously without the expectation of being loved in return, and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Lord, Give me the right perspective so I might serve you selflessly, give my life a focus and understanding of the struggle and pain of others so I might respond appropriately. Lord, I give you all I have. I am ready. Amen

Our closing hymn is “They’ll Know we are Christians” in TFWS, p. 2223. Please stand as you are able.