

Happy Mid-Week to you!

As I began to work on this week's devotion I found myself drawn to this story because – well let's be honest – I am a hugger and I really really miss hugging right now. I miss the joy I get from sharing friendship, encouragement, reassurance and/or love with someone when you give them a hug. Not only are we distancing ourselves right now – we surely can't go around hugging others – it really makes me sad at times.

As we go into this next week – remember we will not be having a service on Sunday because it's the 5th Sunday of the month and that means Service Sunday – think about ways that you can touch others this coming week as well. The story I have chosen for this week is called the Hugging Judge by Jack Canfield and Mark V. Hansen.

Lee Shapiro is a retired judge. He realized that love is the greatest power. As a result, Lee became a hugger and began offering everybody a hug. His colleagues dubbed him "the hugging judge". Lee created what he calls his Hugger Kit. On the outside, it reads "A heart for a hug". The inside contains little red embroidered hearts with stickums on the back. Lee will carry his Hugger Kit, go around to people and offer them a little red heart in exchange for a hug. Lee has become famous for this that he is often invited to conferences and conventions, where he shares his message of unconditional love.

One day, Lee's friend Nancy Johnson showed up on his doorstep. Nancy is a professional clown and she was wearing her clown costume and makeup. "Lee, grab your Hugger Kit and let's go out to the home for the disabled." When they arrived, they started giving out balloon hats, hearts and hugs to the patients. Lee was uncomfortable. He had never hugged people who were terminally ill or severely disabled – mentally and physically. It was definitely a stretch. But after a while, it became easier with Nancy and Lee acquiring an entourage of doctors, nurses and orderlies who followed them from ward to ward.

After several hours, they entered the last ward. There were worst cases Lee had seen in his life. The feeling is so grim that it took his heart away.

But out of their commitment to share their love and to make a difference, Nancy and Lee started working their way around the room. Finally, Lee came to the last patient, Leonard. Leonard was wearing a big white bib which he was drooling on. Lee looked at Leonard dribbling onto his bib and said, "Let's go Nancy. There's no way we can get through this patient." Nancy replied, "C'mon, Lee. He's a fellow human being, too, isn't he?" Then she placed a funny balloon hat on Leonard's head. Lee took one of his little red hearts and placed it on Leonard's bib. He took a deep breath, leaned down and gave Leonard a hug.

All of a sudden, Leonard began to squeal, "Eeeeeeehh! Eeeeeeehh!" Some of the other patients in the room began to clang things together. Lee turned to the medical staff for explanation only to find they were crying. Lee asked the head nurse, "What's going on?"

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The nurse said, "This is the first time in 23 years we've seen Leonard smile."

Wow! I know how I feel about hugs but to read this story puts it really into perspective, doesn't it. There is something about another reaching out to show someone that you care and are present with them. We are reminded of the importance of hugs and embraces when we listen to one of the most favorite verses in the Bible –

Mark 10:16

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Jesus took the children into his arms – and remember we are all his children so we too can have that image and imagine the feeling of Jesus wrapping his arms around us in our lives as well.

So how can we translate this to what we are currently dealing with in our pandemic isolated state?? Well we can hug others - even if that reaching out right now isn't physical, it can still continue to be a wonderful way to share God's love and presence with others. I've mentioned each week in my announcements

that there really are so many who are isolated – completely alone – in this shelter in place orders. Many of us are able to be in community with our immediate families. Many of us are continuing to work as we are essential employees so we continue to have outside contact with others. Some of us however are stuck in our rooms because the facility we live in is under quarantine to ensure that we all stay safe and healthy. Some of us are in our homes but we live alone and spend way too many hours perhaps talking to ourselves – and yes, I have found myself talking to myself a lot these last couple of months. HA HA ALL of us need community and conversation and connections with others and right now that is perhaps even more important than ever.

Here's your challenge – here's your charge.

1 John 4:7-10

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

Take a moment this coming week and find a way to give another a hug. Sunday is our Service Sunday at Perley Parish – find a way to serve another in big or small ways to show them that they are important and thought about. That they are children of God and that they are being embraced by their loving God even when they are feeling alone.

May we all remember those like Leonard in our story – who haven't maybe felt like they were in community or shown themselves to another for a long time. Can we all find ways to share the love of God and serve our neighbors and friends during this time of uncertainty and concern? I know that God is with me, I know that God is with you and I know that we all need that love, that connection and that hug some days – be the one to share it!

Let us pray....

Gracious and loving God, we are all feeling a little disconnected and lonesome right now. We all long to be back together and in the lives that we once knew. Help us to share your loving embrace and your continued presence with those who are in-need of it. We know that you are with us always but sometimes we need to know that others are with us as well. For all that we need we look to you, in your loving name we pray. Amen!

Announcements:

Reminder – No service on the 31st – if you/your family does find a way to serve/hug your neighbors snap a picture of it and send it to myself or John at mjenson001@luthersem.edu or johnnyc45@gmail.com so we can get them posted on Facebook for Service Sunday.

ALSO.... Our “Where’s Michele?” game has begun with this mid-week devotion. Each week I will be finding a fun and unique place to stream our service and ask that you guess where I am located. I will attach a picture to your mid-week devotion as well if you aren’t able to login and watch. Please call or email the church or myself by TUESDAY of the next week to enter your name in a drawing at the end of the summer to win a prize. Guesses will be cut off on Tuesdays so I can explain where I was “last week” in the Wednesday devotion. Some of the locations will be easy to guess and others may be quite difficult – I’m going to try to keep you all guessing. 😊 Any/All guesses will be included in the drawing. Hope you can play along. All locations will be in the Fargo/Moorhead/West Fargo area unless otherwise noted.

Church phone is 701-866-6681 or my phone at 701-261-0998 to leave a message or text your guess

Email to me at mjenson001@luthersem.edu or church perleyparish@gmail.com

Text me at 701-261-0998

THIS WEEKS LOCATION IS:

