

Today we are starting a new 6-week series called “And the Band Played On”. It’s a take on the prayer of St. Francis Assisi. This prayer opens with a plea to make us instruments. So each week we will take a positive trait from the prayer tie it to an instrument. Some instruments will be familiar, and some will be downright strange. This week we look at the line “Where there is hatred, let me so love.” Lyres of love.

What is a lyre you might ask? A lyre is a stringed instrument. It is typically u shaped with two arms and a bar across the top. From this bar, strings are stretched to the bottom of the instrument. The number of strings varies from 3-10. This is an old instrument. Evidence of lyres have been found in Mesopotamia, dating all the way back to 2700 BC. What does a lyre sound like? I’m glad you asked!

[Click here to hear recording of a lyre.](#)

So who was St. Francis Assisi? No matter whether you are Catholic or Protestant, no matter what flavor of Protestant you are, St. Francis is a universal voice across many people. How many have heard of St. Francis



I’d like to tell you that St. Francis came from humble beginnings, but he did not. He was baptized as Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone. However his father was away on business when this happened. When he returned, he insisted that his son be named Francis. Francis was born into the family of a wealthy cloth merchant in the late 12th century. He lived a life of wealth and ease. As a young man, he gained notoriety as a partier and a drinker. He fought in a war against a town called Perugia, which was west of Assisi. In this battle he was captured and held prisoner for a year.

It was while he was in prison that he began seeing visions from God. One night he heard the voice of Jesus saying, “Go, Francis, and repair my house which, as you see, is well-nigh in ruins.” Like any of us would, he first thought this meant physically repairing the church. Later he came to realize that it meant much more.

It was an encounter with a leper that changed his life. One day while riding on horseback, he saw a man disfigured by this disease. He was overcome with pity. Francis jumped down off of his horse, gave the leper his cloak and even dared to kiss him. It was this event that led to Francis rejecting his wealth. Instead he began to live a simple life. He abdicated his life of luxury for things like manual labor and ministering to the sick.

Throughout the rest of his life, Francis would be known for establishing the order of Franciscan monks. This order had one simple rule. “To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps.” He would inspire Clare of Assisi to establish the order called Poor Clares. St. Francis would be known for his commitment to poverty and charity. He reestablished a desire to know the human Jesus and a commitment by his followers to follow Jesus’ example. As John Wesley was so apt to do, St. Francis preached to simple townfolk. That John Wesley was inspired by St. Francis is an understatement.

St. Francis is best known as the Patron Saint of animals. His association with animals is augmented by the many stories that involved St. Francis and animals.

One such story is that of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio. St. Francis visits the village of Gubbio in Italy. In this town a wolf is ravaging the town and has developed a taste for humans. The villagers live in abject terror. St. Francis goes out to meet the wolf. The wolf comes charging toward Francis, mouth open, ready to attack.

St Francis makes the sign of the cross over the wolf and says. “Come here, Brother Wolf. I command you on behalf of Christ that you do no harm to me or anything else.” With this, the

wolf closed his mouth and stopped running. It came as meekly as a lamb and bowed at the feet of St. Francis.

St. Francis then made a deal with the wolf. In exchange for not harming the humans or animals of Gubbio, the wolf would be kept fed and happy. The wolf showed acceptance of this agreement by bowing his head. St. Francis goes to the village and asks for their agreement to this deal. They all agree that they will.

When St. Francis asks the wolf to show a sign of his agreement to this deal, the wolf lifts his right paw and places it in the hand of St. Francis. The town erupts in rejoicing. Through St. Francis they were saved from the jaws of the beast.

True or not, this story sends us a message. Even today St. Francis is teaching us about strength in the midst of adversity. He could have easily just asked that the wolf be killed. This wasn't the way of Jesus. We need each other. Not just humans needing humans. Humans and creation need each other.

Back to sermon slide

As we look at our passage today, I'm reminded of the words from the poet John Donne, "No man is an island. No man stands alone. Each man's joy is joy to me, each man's grief is my own." These words are ageless. They express an ageless need.

We are social animals. Not by of choice but out of necessity. We cannot survive by ourselves. None of us have all the gifts and talents needed to survive, and examples of self-sufficiency—hermits and mountain men—certainly aren't anyone's idea of an abundant life

Today's lifestyle and culture rail against community and relationships.

" We leave our families and friends and move to distant lands,

“ We work in a “dog eat dog” world where the trust necessary for deep relationships is often betrayed.

“ We cocoon ourselves, when we are home, behind six-foot concrete walls, and surround sound.

Today we are talking about lyres of love. Love is a celebration of God’s gift of community. It’s a call to commit ourselves to making St. John’s United Methodist church a place where everyone and I mean everyone can experience a significant, vital church family. Want to know how to do that? Oh thank goodness. You just asked for more sermon. Here’s how we do that.

We declare St Johns to be a PLACE OF SUPPORT

In his letter to the church, John stressed the need for love. He understood love to be a core personality trait of God, and the central distinguishing characteristic of the Christian community. When the church is at its best, it is a fellowship of love. A Roman official wrote of the early Christians, “Behold, how they love one another.”

One of the ways that love is translated into everyday language is through support. I read an article about someone who was both a pastor and a biker. He shared that there are two types of bikers—those that have fallen and those that will fall. That sounds like logic we can use here, right now. There are also two types of people—those who have encountered hard times and have needed the support of others, and those who will.

Our family experienced the support of all of you when Suzanne had her health issues with her gall bladder. We felt immediately cared for. We knew all of you were praying and supporting us.

We are a church family that is a place of support and comfort in the midst of difficulties. We are a place of support and encouragement during the process of recovery and other life-long processes.

Next, we declare St. Johns to be A PLACE OF CELEBRATION

Our church family is a place where celebrations happen. Together we celebrate God's blessings, God's use of our talents and abilities to make an impact on the lives of others, and God's powerful movement in our community and the world.

Aren't the emptiest moments of any life the ones where we have a success to celebrate and no one to celebrate it with —no one to toast with, no one to cheer with.

It is with a Church family's love that we celebrate milestones in our lives, accomplishments we achieve, obstacles we overcome, and lives that we touch. Yes, the glory goes to God, but remember that God is doing great things in and through us.

Finally we declare St. John's to be A PLACE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Change rarely takes place without being accountable to others. How many times have we vowed to lose weight only to fail because we kept our intentions to ourselves? We needed support and accountability.

One aspect of being a part of a church family is that there can be accountability between members. We can read the Bible alone, agree with its words, and still not change. In a small group, where love is present and trust is strong, we can challenge each other concerning the call of Scripture on our lives.

We've been taught for so many years that our relationship with God and our Christian discipleship is a personal thing—just between me and God. We've set out to improve our relationship with God by self-discipline and trying harder. Who here has failed miserably? It's because this is a symbiotic relationship. We cannot grow in our relationship with God until we grow in our relationship with others. We cannot grow in our relationship with God until we are accountable to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's love. Not just about us, but about God and the body of Christ. This is what turns hatred into love. Let us pray,

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