

# Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

## Sharing God's Love - John 3:16

As I received the stole from Annette I couldn't help but notice that it cried out to be preached about. So for the next several weeks you are going to be constantly reminded of this vision we have for St. Paul. It appears on every letterhead, on the web page, on your bulletin cover, on the Stewardship Campaign information – every place that our Logo appears – there is our vision statement.

St. Paul United Methodist Church  
**Sharing God's Love**  
**Changing lives**  
**Serving the Community**

Turn in your pew bible to John 3:16. What page # is it? Don't be shy this is not a rhetorical question, someone look up the scripture and tell the rest of us what page number. We Methodists tend to be a little scripture shy. By that I mean sometimes we don't know our way around the book as well as we might. I know in the past we have cheated and Linda in the office has given you the page # but, we are going to use this worship time to do a lot of things with God and one will be to learn our way around God's word.

**For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

For God so loved... Jesus coming and the gift of eternal life is not because we needed it (sure we needed it), but the reason for Jesus coming was because God Loves You. God loves you, every single one of us with our quirks and warts and strange habits and bad tempers and petty feelings and all the rest of who we are right now. God loves you.

I want you to remember that today so stand up and hug the person in front and behind you. Now give a holy kiss to the people sitting on your right and left. You know what a holy kiss is. Let me show you – James.

You are loved by God and that is the best news you are ever going to hear from this or any other church.

But I've noticed that not everyone in Jacksonville is here today. That guy at work who is always crabby isn't seated next to you now for me to tell him of Jesus' love. That lonely lady that you see in the library when you visit hasn't heard about the love God has for her. That teenager you pass every day somewhere on the streets doesn't know of Jesus love for them.

That brings me to the strange item in your church bulletin this morning – the playing card. That's your reminder when you leave here. I gave you the playing card for you and God together to decide on who God wants you to love. In a deck of cards there are 52 different faces and colors and numbers. In your life God has placed lots of different people, but this next year I'll just bet if you listen for the voice of God you will find there is one special person God wants to know about his love for them. And you are going to be God's instrument of love.

Sharing God's Love – that is the first part of our vision for St. Paul I am going to expect you to be doing that. And I'm going to ask from time to time. I have not yet talked with the prayer people yet but I want a way for you to share just the first name of the person God calls you to love this year that they can begin praying for them to be open to God's love shared through you.

But in the mean time that card needs to go onto your refrigerator or on the bath room mirror or where ever you will see it regularly to remind you of that one person God wants you to share God's love with this year. You need to pray and seek God's guidance in who that person is and when you know the name then when you think of that 2 of hearts card I want you to call their name to your mind.

I want to make myself real clear now so you are not confused. The purpose is not for you to invite them to church, or to get them involved in the ministry you do here. You are just to love and pray for them for one year. Love in a way they can receive. Love in a way they can understand. Love in a way that will have lasting meaning for them not to make you feel better.

Bring the girl at the check out a cup of coffee when she doesn't like coffee is not loving it is just asking to be thanked. (it is for you)

Linda likes cut flowers. For years I planted rose gardens for her and still do. But when I want to tell her I love her – I buy cut flowers. (yes they are dying, yes in a week they will be gone...but when she gets them she knows I love her.) It is about her knowing I love her not my feeling like I have told her I love her.

How long do I want you to love them?

1. God will say forever and I will agree, but having said that I want you to listen to them. Love them until they ask why they are being loved – then tell them about your relationship with Jesus as simply as you can and mention your church where you are learning to love and would like to have them come. (if they aren't interested or ask you not to talk religion to them – you must continue to love for at least 1 more full year!)
2. if they never ask why you are loving them then at end of year (next January) you are to tell them about your relationship with Jesus as simply as you can and mention your church where you would love to invite them to come. (if they don't want to come – you must love them for one more year!) (story of the fig tree that is not bearing fruit – you are doing your best to help them bear fruit...at end of your time of loving them pray that God will bring another Christian into their life to love them --- be ready in future to love them again if they come back)

Let me share a personal story from my wife about the power of letting God love people through you. In a former church the United Methodist Women had a secret pal program. For two years you got the name of someone in the UMW and you loved them secretly. You gave her cards and little gift and sent words of encouragement and then at the Christmas meeting on the even years you revealed yourself as their secret pal. Linda drew the name of a lady in the group who openly hated her. In every way at every occasion whenever it would hurt the worst she always belittled or demeaned or was cruel to her. She wanted to get out of it or get a new name but through prayer and encouragement she decided on a new approach. She would love her. At every occasion, even non-occasions like St. Patrick's Day or on no occasion like the second Tuesday of the month she sent cards of encouragement. She told her of praying for family members during times of health crisis. She sent her a card once when she was gone on an extended vacation. And the Lady could not wait until she found out who had been the best Secret Pal she had ever had. No one had ever show her such love and caring. I wish I could tell you that they became fast friends – but that would be a lie. What happened was that she didn't know how to take it. She was so surprised at that Christmas meeting when Linda delivered a hand made gift the woman had always hoped for. I can tell you that she was changed. No one in that church was ever allowed to even look crossed eyed at Linda again. Don't think about arguing or demeaning or giving Linda a hard time because you had to go through her first. Years later when we left her husband and son still talked about the changed that had taken place in her life because of the Love of God she experienced through Linda.

You are the church - this is a building and buildings don't love. You are the church...the body of Christ here to love – your task is to listen to God as God chooses one for you to love this year. It will be someone outside the fellowship of this church. Someone God knows desperately needs to know of God's love and you are going to be God's instrument so that can experience bve. Remember the closing words on the Mission Impossible – “Your mission Mr. Phelps should you desire to take it...” Your task should to desire to accept it is to LOVE! Pick up your card – listen for the voice of God and LOVE!