

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
November 6, 2011
Series: Church Works

Greater Love

We live in a world that is driven, primarily, by hate. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Hate is what unifies, motivates and drives our world at every level: individuals, families, cities, states, nations...even sports teams.

I remember when I went to the University of Arizona – and we hated our rivals at Arizona State. Our marching band marched through the tunnel out onto ASU's football field at halftime and the ASU fans threw ice and drinks at us. "Our hate was justified," we thought.

Some of you hate the Dallas Cowboys. Cowboy fans hate the Eagles. And the Eagles hate the Giants. The Cubs hate the White Sox and the Red Sox hate the Yankees. In 2004 a Los Angeles Dodger fan was shot and killed by a San Francisco Giant fan, after an argument that started in the baseball stadium. He died. A few weeks ago a Philadelphia Phillies fan was similarly killed by a St Louis Cardinal's fan.

One sports writer said this of College football: "Tons and tons and tons of unbridled hate. Schools hating schools. States hating states. Towns hating towns. They don't even know why they hate each other so much, but they do! And that's what makes it such good hate. If you knew why you hated something, that means you'd have more trouble justifying it to yourself. And I don't like the idea of that at all. I like that hate to go unquestioned, free roam and burn as it pleases." (Deadspin.com, Drew MaGary, Aug 24, 2010).

There is MUCH hatred in sports – but hatred is also popular in families: The Hatfield's and McCoy's; the Capulet's and Montague's. Hate between families. Hate within families. Hate in marriages. It is with breathtaking speed and shocking regularity that the love of newly married couple turns to hate – a primary reason for the 50% divorce rate. The one you loved is now the enemy. Domestic violence calls are the most common and most feared calls for any public safety officer. Stolen inheritances, vitriolic letters that should never have been written, grudges, betrayals, revenge and backstabbing all characterize many families today.

Hate is also the lifeblood of politics. Republicans hate democrats, and democrats hate republicans. Communists hate capitalists, democracies hate dictatorships, and anarchists hate them all. Tunisia, Oman, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Iran have all gone through internal revolutions this year - 2011 – where people have been killed in hatred of the opposition party.

And most people groups hate other people groups. Genocides are more popular today than at any time in history. The Tutsi and Hutus in Rwanda have a long history of hatred of toward one another, which resulted in upwards of a million people killed. The hatred of the Muslim Sunnis and Shiites's goes back to the 7th century and drives modern Middle Eastern politics today. Even our peaceful neighbors to the north, Canada, I read in an article this week - have a hatred of Quebec, and Quebec hates them right back. The hatred of the world toward the Jews has gone on for thousands of years. North Korea hates South Korea, India Hates Pakistan. If you think about it - most borders on a map came as a result of hate filled wars. Most middle-eastern countries hate America. And America hates in return. We have a history, in this country, until very recently, of hatred toward African

Americans, hatred of Japanese during WWII, Chinese during the 1800's and most all immigrants at all times. Our country's hatred and abuse of Native Americans continues to be a disgrace.

I was at a lecture with Hayden as part of a College tour recently and the professor said, "The villages in the south of Italy hate one another passionately." He asked, "How do you get them to get along? You show them a northern Italy City – because southern Italians hate northern Italians more than they hate one another. Well then, how do you get northern and southern Italians to get along? Introduce them to someone from Tirol Austria, because that used to be part of Italy – and all Italians hate them." And on it goes. Hatred is a great unifier of people.

Anglican Minister William Ralph Inge said, "A nation is a society united by a delusion about its ancestry and by common hatred of its neighbors."

Well – are we Christians any better? In 1054 the Eastern and Western churches spilt – it is called the First Great Schism. The Eastern Orthodox church is still waiting for the Roman Catholic church to apologize for the 4th crusade that occurred in 1204. And church splits have characterized the Protestant Christian church being now an estimated 38,000 different denominations. Every new movement, it seems, rises by disparaging the previous one. The contemporary movement mocks traditional churches. The emerging movement ridiculed the contemporary folks. The churchless movement dismisses all of them as being pagan. Historically fundamentalists have hated any who would play cards, dance, drink alcohol, wear red fingernail polish or read a Sunday newspaper. Heated conflicts today about school choices, parenting styles, politics, worship music, role of women, and the age of the earth passionately divide brother from sister in the church.

We live in a world driven by hate.

Am I wrong?

Would you argue that the world is motivated by something else? If so, what? What would you propose has more power to destroy families, split churches, shape governments, start wars, initiate movements and topple dictatorships? Hate may not be the only game in town, but it has a big role on the world's stage.

TRANSITION

BUT... today we are going to see that there is a power greater than hate! There is a force bigger, stronger and far more powerful than hate and all its fiendish friends – and that force is love. **Love is greater than hate.** Love is the greatest of all Christian virtue.

And love is our third purpose as a church. Today, as we continue with our sermon series called “Church Works” – we come to Jesus’ call for us – His church - in GREAT contrast with the world – to be driven – primarily – by love.

The good news is that “**Love is Greater!**” Greater than what? Five items we will look at briefly: Love is greater than hate; greater than fear; greater than knowledge; greater than faith and hope and greater than all other commandments.

Love is greater than HATE

Let's begin with the truth that love is greater than hate. Jesus said; [Luke 6:27](#) “But I say to you who hear, **love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.** The Apostle John taught: [1John 4:20](#) If someone says, “I love God,” and **hates his brother, he is a liar.**

Love is greater than hate. Even toward those who have wronged you and persecuted you. Love trumps hate.

Quick definition of hate – from a Hebrew Lexicon – and the definition is similar for the Greek: “Hate...expresses an emotional attitude toward persons and things which are opposed, detested, despised and with which one wishes to have no contact or relationship. It is therefore the opposite of love. Whereas love draws and unites, hate separates and keeps distant.” (*Theological Wordbook of the OT*)

Consider this for a moment. Hate does not have to be an angry person with a picket sign screaming at someone! If you detest something, despise something, dismiss something, you have moved into the definition of hate.

Question: Who do you hate? Who are your enemies? IN the church – who is the person you despise, you avoid? If you say you love God by hate your brother – you are a liar, the Bible says. Love is greater than hate.

LOVE IS GREATER THAN FEAR

Second, **love is greater than fear**. Jesus said: **1John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.** Love is GREATER than fear – fear is tossed aside by love.

One of the main reasons we hate is because we fear. We hate what we fear, right? Like Indian Jones, “I hate snakes.” Why? Because I fear snakes. We hate what we fear. Many of the people we struggle with in church or between churches – we do so because we are afraid of them.

Many of you who come from legalistic backgrounds understand this. You were taught to fear other more liberal Christian groups. If you associated with them of their

teachings – you would be corrupted. There is a lot of fear in legalism. The red flag word is “likeminded.” If you are taught to only be around other likeminded Christians – warning bells should go off in your mind, because such calls are nearly always motivated by fear – to stay away from – separate from other believers who are now labeled as “bad-minded.” Over the years Tammy and I have been involved in various programs that had great content and meaning –but when they began to teach, “Hey – you better not associate with those kind of Christians” the good thing turned sour for us.

What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of people who are different than you, who practice their faith differently than you? We should be likeminded in commitment to the gospel, and cardinal doctrines –but the church is to be a place a great diversity in areas of preference.

Love is greater than KNOWLEDGE

Love is greater than hate; than fear, and next love is greater than knowledge. Paul said: [1Cor. 8:1](#) *Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.* Love is greater than knowledge – because knowledge (as good as it can be) often leads to pride. Paul repeats the point: [1Cor. 13:2](#) *If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.*

Love is GREATER than knowledge – because knowledge can lead to pride. And just as hate is fueled by fear – it is equally fueled by arrogance.

I remember maybe a year into my seminary career, I went into a Christian Bookstore. I had just started Greek classes. I had a new language and new theology rattling

around in my brain. And the experience stuck me in a very distinct way - it was as if I saw the bookstore with new eyes. The type of eyes a master painter might have walking into a painting 101 class. I felt pride and superiority for my knowledge. I passed all the English commentaries with contempt and looked in the back for the Greek resources – accessible to only a select few. In a way I felt sorry for all those who didn't know as much as I did. My knowledge, as small as it was, had led to pride, which led to me despise and looking down upon others.

How does your own arrogance lead you to judge or dismiss others in an unbiblical manner? If you have the blessing of higher education – do you tend to look down upon those who don't? If you have been successful in business – do you tend to dismiss those less successful? If you have high-achieving children – do you have a lack of compassion for those whose children are struggling? Has your pride led you to hate others?

The Corinthians Paul addressed - they knew the idols weren't real – they had the right knowledge – but rather than being humbly thankful for that blessing, they held others with contempt. Paul reminds them and us – that love is greater than knowledge.

Love is greater than FAITH and HOPE

Love is greater than hate. It is greater than fear and knowledge. Next love is even greater than faith and hope. Paul said, still in 1 Corinthians - [1Cor. 13:13](#) **But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.** Love greater than faith and hope – and let's consider how love can be greater than faith?

Consider this: **faith can lead to hatred when we believe too strongly.** What do I mean by this? Now you can't believe too strongly in Jesus. You can't have too much faith in the resurrection or prayer. But is possible to believe too strongly in homeschooling? Is it

possible to believe too strongly in republican politics; or in which Bible version is best; or in Calvinism, or in a particular style of music? Pastors believe too strongly in church growth strategies, and on it goes.

The Corinthians believed too strongly in their right to eat meat – so that they nearly destroyed the faith of those who did not feel that freedom. They believed too strongly in Paul and Apollos as ideal leaders and split the church. Paul told them **to back off** – Their faith was leading to hatred and division in the church. It is OK to have convictions but remember some things are preferences – which you believe with humility and tolerance for other's points of view.

If there something you believe too strongly? Maybe there is a gray area – where your conviction has taken on a life of its own – and has landed you back to legalism? Remember love is greater than faith. Love is greater than hope.

Love is greater than ALL OTHER COMMANDS

Fifth and last. Love is greater than all other commands. [Mark 12:28](#) One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" [Mark 12:29](#) Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; [Mark 12:30](#) AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' [Mark 12:31](#) "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Love is GREATER than all other commandments of God! This is a call to have the right priorities. Love of God and God's people is a higher priority than your personal

happiness. Higher priority to your preferences. The priority of us to love God and one another could not be more high.

E.M. Bounds said, "God is love. There is nothing greater than love, nothing greater than God." (Power through Prayer, 85). Dr. Stanley Toussaint exhorted a seminary class of aspiring pastors: "If you don't have love in the church, you don't have nothing! I mean that. I don't care how good the teaching and preaching is. The goal is love." Dr. Robert Lightner, to another class future ministers: "If you don't love people, we don't need you in the ministry – go do something else!"

There is no commandment greater than the commandment to love. It is the highest priority – but a quick caveat. The high priority of love should not be used to justify sin. "I love him or her..." Love is not greater than obedience – love is obedience to God and His Word."

APPLICATION

And so – let's talk application – which is simply this: "Have a cup of Coffee." This is what I want you to do. How many coffee drinkers? How many non-coffee? Ok – alternative applications could be: "Have a cup of tea, or hot cocoa, milk or anything! But here is the point: I want you to have it in your LCCC Mug.

How many have a LCCC Mug in their home? How many need one? OK – I brought mugs with me – let's get these passed out to any who need one... Please take one per family, if you need a second one for work – that is fine too. Free of charge. Vital to our application.

This week – your mission, should you chose to accept it - is take this mug and fill it with whatever beverage you desire. And then while you enjoy your drink – for 4-5 minutes,

consider the message on the mug – which is: “Living in Loving Community.” Just dwell on that and this message for a few minutes. What did we talk about in this sermon. What is love great than? Hate. Fear. Pride, Legalism, All other priorities. Which of those do you struggle with? What do you fear, hate – what is your prideful area? What other priorities do you have. Take your MUG OF LOVE, and let the Lord remind you that love is greater than all these things!

Conclusion

Julie and Bryon Widner were deep into the white supremacy hate movement. After their 2006 marriage, they decided to get out. The problem is Byron could not get away from the symbols of hate he had tattooed on his body. One article read: “And yet, the past was ever-present – tattooed in brutish symbols all over his body and face: a blood-soaked razor, swastikas, the letters ‘HATE’ stamped across his knuckles.”

After researching without success home remedies, his wife said he was nearly ready to put his face into acid. From the article: “In desperation, Julie did something that once would have been unimaginable. She reached out to a black man whom white supremacists consider their sworn enemy.” The man was part of the Southern Poverty Law Centre, and he found a donor who sponsored the removal of the tattoos.

To remove hate from his life, Byron had to undergo 25 painful surgeries where the ink was burned off his face. He endured the pain necessary to remove hate from his life.

The question I had, though, is WHY a hate filled white supremacist would all the sudden change? That is very unusual. I read several articles and gleaned a few lines that perhaps answer that question. In one article I read, “they’ve joined a church” Good sign. In

another article: “They are getting input from their pastor.” Excellent. And in yet another report : “they are praying to a God – a God who is Himself Love.” I don’t know for sure – but the evidence point to God changing this young man’s life.

It may be painful for you to remove hate from your life – but it is worthy it. God may have to laser some bad ink from your soul and mine – and it will scar, but it will also heal.

My greatest desire for us as a church is that we would be characterized by love. Jesus said: [1John 3:13](#) **Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.** That is OK – we understand that is what drives the world – but we have something greater – we have love. Drink from the mug of love this week and consider how we are called, as a church community, to live in loving community.