

“They’ll Know What? How?”  
A Epiphany Six; I Corinthians 3:1-9  
February 12, 2017  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
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## **I. VICTORY IN JESUS**

Monday morning, I woke up with a song in my head. An old song. A traditional hymn—so traditional it’s not even in our hymnal! I thought, “What the heck?! That’s not a hymn we sing much; not sure I’ve sung it since my childhood in the Baptist church.”

After I’d been up awhile and had some coffee, did some chores, loved on the dogs (and the hubby) and was getting about my day.....it was still there!

Are you curious yet? What the song is?  
“Oh victory in Jesus!  
My Savior forever!  
He \_\_\_\_\_me and bought me with his redeeming love....

I had to stop and ask myself, what “Victory in Jesus” had anything to do with anything. I don’t usually feel drawn to “battle imagery” in my theology; in my thinking about God, and living my life in the steps of Jesus.

Then it hit me.  
“O victory in Jesus, my Savior forever!  
He *loved* me ere I knew him,  
and all my love is due him;  
he plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood.”

It’s not about a battle. It’s about Baptism, and the Great Commandment and the core of our faith, and the ONLY thing that brings us victory ultimately: Love. For God so loved the world. For God so loved us—before we were even born. For God so loved us that he sent Jesus to show us what love looks like. And to give us the Roadmap for living every single day of our lives: Love.

This love is not a sentimental, Valentine’s, googly-eyed kind of love. It’s not a weak or romantic notion or emotion, but a force to be reckoned with. It is a battle cry of sorts! This is the love we are to focus with our whole being on the One who made us and calls us.

To Love—actively and proactively -- with everything we have and are—our neighbor; ourselves; our enemies. Those who are easy to love and those who are not. Not easy, mushy, sentimental love, but “lay down your life love”.

“I heard about his healing,  
of his cleansing power revealing,  
how he made the lame to walk again  
and caused the blind to see;  
and then I cried, “Dear Jesus,  
come and heal my broken spirit,”  
and somehow Jesus came  
and brought to me the victory.”

## **II. PAUL'S EAR WORM**

And there ya have it! And there, in our scripture today, they were *getting it* in Corinth, as Paul is laying it on them. They apparently were focused on a different kind of victory—not a Jesus victory, but an “I’m more holy than you are” kind of battle. I guess we shouldn’t be too hard on them, since they didn’t have this hymn yet! It wasn’t written until 1939.

Paul dishes it to them:

**3 1-4** But for right now, friends, I’m completely frustrated by your unspiritual dealings with each other and with God. You’re acting like infants in relation to Christ. As long as you focus on what makes you feel good or makes you look important, or are concerned with “who’s on Paul’s side and who’s on Apollos,” aren’t you being totally immature?

**5-9** Who do you think Paul is, anyway? Or Apollos, for that matter? Servants, both of us—servants who waited on you as you gradually learned to entrust your lives to our mutual Master. We each carried out our servant assignment. I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plants, but *God* made you grow. It’s not the one who plants or the one who waters who is at

the center of this process but God, who makes things grow. Planting and watering are menial servant jobs at minimum wages. What makes them worth doing is the God we are serving. You happen to be God’s field in which we are working.

## **III. GOD’S FIELD AND FRUIT**

What would Paul say to us? Here, today. When we hear these words of scriptures from another place and time, we are charged to take an honest look at ourselves and see if there is a message we need to hear, like was heard in Corinth.

And we are, in fact, “God’s field in which God’s servants are working.” With what are we concerned? With the things of God? A Jesus kind of victory, or a squabbling about inconsequential matters? The seeds are planted, God does the watering, how does our garden grow?

Emily Dickinson wrote a poem that sheds light on how we might grow in our garden:

I had no time to hate, because  
The grave would hinder me,  
And life was not so ample I  
Could finish enmity.

Nor had I time to love; but since

Some industry *must* be,  
The “little toil of love,” I thought,  
Was large enough for me.

#### **IV. LIGHT AND LOVE—ALL TOGETHER!**

Last week we began to explore how we accomplish a “little toil of love” with the ordinary elements of life: Salt and Light.

How we are called to shake with Salt—to bring spice and flavor to life. In every possible place and situation we can.

And, we are commanded to shine. To bring the Light—*of* the world and *for* the world God loves—we are part of keeping things vibrant, alive, lively and love-filled by shining God’s light out of us and into the world, resisting those forces and facts that would squelch, extinguish and put a bushel over our spark.

And, we are charged not to play small. To remember we are about God’s business. “Don’t minimize your impact; one act of love can change the world.”

When we shake and when we shine, we bring our own unique “little toil of love” into the world. Bring it to birth. And that is how the Holy Garden grows.

#### **V. TOIL OF LOVE: JESUS’ KIND OF VICTORY**

##### **A. Toil on the Train**

An everyday Joe in New York told of this “toil of love” that happened just the other day:

I got on the subway in Manhattan tonight and found a Swastika on every advertisement and every window. The train was silent as everyone stared at each other, uncomfortable and unsure what to do.

One guy got up and said, "Hand sanitizer gets rid of Sharpie. We need rubbing alcohol." He found some tissues and got to work.

I've never seen so many people simultaneously reach into their bags and pockets looking for tissues and Purel. Within about two minutes, all the Nazi symbolism was gone.

##### **B. Toil the Ground**

Closer to home, an idea of how to shake salt and shine light took form quickly, and soon the “toil of love” will be toiling the ground at CUCC.

Shawna Kinkaid was inspired to create a garden here at the church and invite the community to be part of creating and tilling and planting and harvesting. She drew up some plans the next day, went to the Trustees’ Meeting, and invited the Interact Club to help! She will be inviting you Scouts to be part of this “toil of love” as well!

##### **C. Lightning Dog**

And close to my family’s heart, we have an example of a “little toil of love” in our not-so-little Bernese Mountain Dog who crossed the Rainbow Bridge

yesterday.

Lightning *lived* to love. To lean on you till you fell over, to throw her big old head under your hand so you *had* to stop working and take time to pet, and scratch, and love on your fur family –cuz that was more important than work! She loved to be close and in the middle of life—even taking the other dogs’ leashes in her mouth and walking them!

Lightning was named for a lightning bolt of white hair atop her head that appeared the day she was born and never disappeared. (Not for “lightning speed”, though there was that one time she bolted after a jack rabbit—as if she actually thought her 135-pound self could *catch* that lightning-fast hare!)

She shined that light every day of her life. From the top of her head to the sparkle in her eyes, to the bounce in her step and persistence that never quit. Even when cancer had taken over her body and she ached all over.

Lightning Dog had no time for hate. Only time for love, and leaning into life. Leaning into others until they *knew* they were loved without a doubt.

She was not a firecracker. Exploding all over the place with pizazz and sparks flying. But a pilot light—steady, present, glowing and shining –never wavering.

“Don’t be a firecracker. Be a Pilot Light!” (John Lewis, Congressman and Civil Rights Leader)

This is all any of us really have time for, isn’t it? For shining steady and helping love to ignite wherever we find ourselves. For how will our garden grow, when God has planted and watered and tilled us—except with countless little “toils of love”.

How will they know we are God’s garden? Know we are Christians? Not by our face, by our incomes, not by our awards and recognitions. Not by the numbers of people we draw to our clubs and organizations. Not by the size of our building or the response to our invitation. No, they will know we are Christians by our LOVE.

What will be your little toil of love? Today. Tonight. Tomorrow morning? The next day?