

January 18, 2026 Sermon – Who?

Our first scripture passage today is one I'm sure you've heard close to if not more than a hundred times. Though many students of the Bible could easily tell you instantly that it comes from Corinthians 13, a great many others, including myself, might just say, "You know, the love passage." In looking at this passage and all of the different types of love, I found an anonymous quote that I wanted to share, one that I hope will set up most of what today's message is.

"Some love stories don't come with big moments or perfect words. They come in small actions that repeat day after day. Quiet love doesn't shout to be heard. It just shows up, faithfully, gently, and without fanfare. It's the hug before work. The way someone folds your laundry just the way you like it. The steady support during hard times. This kind of love doesn't need an audience. It simply is. And that quiet presence can be the most powerful thing in the world."

We've all had moments when someone is passionately sharing a story about someone they assume we know about, and our first inclination is to ask the question, "Who?" While a reexplanation sometimes helps, many times, the person we're talking to could tell us how we should know this person ten times, and we'll still be confused. However, what's not confusing in these moments is the influence that that other person had on the person we're talking to, and that unknown influence can have a deeper impact than we might realize. From teachers to doctors and nurses to that familiar face at our favorite grocery store to the friends of our parents when we were children and so many more, we all have unsung heroes in our lives, people who have had or still have an influence on who we are but who if mentioned around other people, might prompt the question, "Who?"

You might not have ever heard of the Haskell Free Library and Opera House, but small towns in both Vermont AND Quebec have, and this small building means a lot to them. You see, the Haskell Free Library and Opera House exists in BOTH Derby Line, Vermont AND Stanstead, Quebec. Though it might seem like something small, this library has been uniting international neighbors since 1904. There's actually a line down the middle of the library displaying the international border. Until recently, the only way

to enter the library was by going down the Vermont sidewalk and entering the front door. However, with recent concerns about international restrictions, volunteers took it upon themselves to construct a door on the Canadian side of the building, so they would have an easy way to enter. Obviously, this is a very, VERY, small concern compared to other international and immigration issues currently surrounding society, issues that are way too similar to other freedom restrictions that have plagued our society throughout history. However, one thing that both the small and the large places have in common is that great things can happen and have a long-lasting influence by even the most unknown faces.

Case in point, today, we heard the age-old story of feeding the crowd with the loaves and the fishes. We know this story backward and forward, so let me know ask you a question. Where did bread and fish come from? Here's a reminder of what was read, "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" We don't know who this boy is. We don't know why he was there. We don't even know if he was the one who first approached Jesus and the disciples, offering what may have been his only meal of the day or what was meant to be a meal for his family. Andrew may have even approached him with a "Hey, kid, whatchya got in the basket?" What we do know is that this often-forgotten person gave what he had and that that small offering stretched farther than I'm sure he ever could have imagined.

Throughout Advent, Greg talked a lot about silent and strong Joseph and how we really don't know much about him. There's an additional person or persons we don't know much about, the inn keeper. We've been taught that Jesus was born with the animals because there was no room at the inn. In our house, we've actually made the joke that if he were ever asked, "What? Were you born in a barn?!", his answer could be a resounding "Yes!" Question. Who ran the inn? We're told there was no room there when Mary was ready to give birth, but we don't know who told them they could stay on the property...or do we? Recent studies of the language used in this passage suggest that they might not have stayed in what we would think of as a hotel-style inn at all, as there are two different words for "inn" and that one of them used here, *kataluma*, actually meant a lodging space within what could have been a family home, a thought

that makes sense when you consider that they were traveling to Joseph's childhood home of Bethlehem and that he would have probably had relatives there. Do we know who they might have been? Nope! However, we know that once again, whether it was a traditional inn or a family home, the impact of the unknown person or persons had a lasting effect on this new family and on the history of the world.

Tomorrow, we celebrate and remember the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and we remember and honor the work of the civil rights movement while trying to continue to embody these lessons today. We all know the story of Rosa Parks and what happened on December 1, 1955, but did you know that Rosa Parks was actually not the first person to refuse to give up her bus seat to a white passenger? Nine months earlier, on March 2, 1955, a fifteen-year-old girl named Claudette Colvin was riding the bus home from school when the bus driver announced that she needed to get up and give up her seat to a white woman. When Colvin refused several times, police officers forcefully arrested her, with onlookers noting that she fought hard not to be arrested. So why wasn't she the face of the civil rights movement? After several meetings, civil rights leaders in Montgomery deemed that although they admired her feisty nature, they fear the community wouldn't follow the example of a young girl. What many people don't know is that Claudette Colvin continued working with the NAACP throughout her young years, mentored by one Rosa Parks, a woman who she admired greatly and who she would fully support later that year. Claudette Colvin passed away just this past Tuesday, at the age of 86, fully supporting throughout her life, the belief that Rosa Parks was the right choice but knowing, due to Parks' support, that she herself had helped start a movement that would change history.

I'd like to close this message with the tail end of the anonymous quote I started with. As you hear these words from an unknown source, remember that good can come from the most remarkable places and that it's the combination of both sung and unsung heroes that can bring light and love in even the darkest times.

"If you've ever felt unseen in the love you give, know this, it matters. Love that shows up without needing praise is the kind that holds everything together."

Amen.