

Feb. 2017 – Season of Epiphany

Series: “Loving Large”

Members present: Mary Ivanov, Betty Kinney, Diane Thompson, Betty Kinney, Carole Koch, Vicki Zuker, Larry Jorgensen, and Karen Booth is person; Lynne Richmond via email notes

Ideas for the series:

February 2017 is filled with big events: Super Bowl, Valentine’s Day, President’s Day, Grammy Awards, Oscars, and (this year) Mardi Gras. All of these are moments or days that reflect things or people we love: football and favorite teams, special people, revered leaders, music, movies, and celebration.

Love is at the root of who Jesus is and who he calls us to be, but we get sidetracked and veer away from his message easily. Our faith in Jesus Christ calls us to love sacrificially, but we struggle to resist the pull of money, greed, and power. **What would the world look like if it was transformed by the love of God? How do we love God and neighbor and serve God and neighbor in order to transform the world?**

We can highlight a mission connection each week in worship - and specifically how it changes the life of one who serves - not only those who are recipients. This would help us to consider “relational” (in relationship with people) vs. “transactional” (giving money or stuff) mission - one of our VCI prescriptions.

Note: The series is book-ended by two versions of Jesus’ words regarding the greatest commandment.



Images/visuals:

- Big red heart (or stick heart) surrounded by paper dolls. Could we make the nested hearts 3-dimensional (like a mobile) with Loving Large in the center? Cantilever it out over the ledge. More inspiration images are in Dropbox (<https://www.dropbox.com/home/LHUMC/Loving%20Large%20Feb%202017>). Ask Gary Cooper for help.
- Suggestions from the Loving Large resources: “Use the red and black sparingly, lest you overpower your worship space or weigh it down with darker colors.”
- Image for “change.”
- Three large intersecting hearts using God, Self, and Others (from Lynne).

Media intro: “Loving Large” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvVs8vZre2o>. We like this intro and think it could be shown weekly. It spells out our call as a church. Does everything we do go back to loving large? Note from Karen: There are slightly different versions of the video for each week that came with Pastor Mary’s resources. See all the resources at <https://www.dropbox.com/home/LHUMC/Loving%20Large%20Feb%202017>.

Resource: <https://www.cokesbury.com/curriculum/8173/loving-large/>

Ministry Matters Resources: <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4037/loving-large-bonus-materials>

Weekly blessing: Love God. Love your neighbor. Go forth and love large.

Drama suggestion (resource materials): Have a group of people dressed all in black all walk out with hands linked to stand across the stage to present the Scripture reading or perform a song.

Music (Lynne): Since so many people love the school songs and get fired up hearing them, how about using school song(s) with images showing loving situations to fire us up? Focus on real love, not idol worship.

Activities:

- Write on a paper heart, answering one of the questions in red, above on page 1. Supplies: We have 66 red hearts and a total of 98 green and blue hearts already cut out. We would prefer to use red and pink hearts rather than green or blue.
- Missions: People will have a chance to share their mission experiences in worship.

Discussion points:

- Take-aways (hands-on items) should be given away if we really believe that we are called to love others.
- Children’s Time activity: Carole Koch knows how to cut a 3” x 5” card so that it can be stretched large enough to walk through the hole. Could it be done with red paper or a heart shape during the series?

Promoting the series: Make a postcard to hand out. Note: Pastor Mary’s promotional materials include a postcard (8.5”x5.5”) file, poster file, graphics for social media, possible tweets, etc.

February 5, 2017: “The Distracted Life”

Scripture: Matthew 22: 34-40 (MSG)

³⁴⁻³⁶ When the Pharisees heard how he had bested the Sadducees, they gathered their forces for an assault. One of their religion scholars spoke for them, posing a question they hoped would show him up: “Teacher, which command in God’s Law is the most important?”

³⁷⁻⁴⁰ Jesus said, **“Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.’ This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ These two commands are pegs; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them.”**

Synopsis: It’s easy to get distracted from the root of God’s call on our lives to love God and neighbor. Up against the hype and enjoyment of the Super Bowl and the extravagance of spending, how can we hear Jesus’ message for ourselves and come back to basics?

Felt need: To refocus on the fundamentals of loving God and loving neighbor

Visuals:

Media possibility: “Idol Worship.” Length: 1:35. Cost: \$15.99. When you think of worshipping idols, what comes to your mind? Golden calves? Giant statues? Here’s a sobering look from The Skit Guys at what we often look like when we bow down to our own idols.

<https://skitguys.com/videos/item/idol-worship>. Comments: Perfect! It could have used

soccer, basketball, racing, or another sport as an illustration, but football is perfect for Super Bowl Sunday. Use it!

Activity: Holy Communion, Souper Bowl of Caring (Super Bowl)

Music:

Discussion points:

- Super Bowl - pro athlete salaries
(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2016/02/02/10-things-to-know-about-the-money-in-super-bowl-50/#75257bfe58a2>).
- Advertisers paid \$5 million for a 30-second commercial in 2016. See <http://superbowl-ads.com/> for examples.
- Gambling: The Social Principles state that, "Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, and destructive of good government. As an act of faith and concern, Christians should abstain from gambling and should strive to minister to those victimized by the practice."
- What distracts us? I pad, technology, phones, video games (which also seem to desensitize players to violence and reduce empathy for fellow humans), too many choices and activities (note how few kids have unsupervised play time today), sports (not that there aren't many great lessons to be learned too), nonessential parts of holidays (e.g. Santa and gifts at Christmas, Easter bunny at Easter, over the top decorating , etc.), social media (Pastor Mary realized just recently that Ana has never had to learn how to make an actual phone call. This is a major change that we will also explore on January 29 with *Sing*.)
- What does loving look like in community? Pastor Mary also recognizes how she keeps us with old friends using WhatsApp (logo, right).
- Rise in human trafficking at big sporting events. Note from Karen before the gathering: Any human trafficking is bad, but the link between sporting event and trafficking is not clear. For more details see:
 - <https://love146.org/superbowl/>
 - http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/super-bowl-sex-trafficking-harmful_us_56b4e08be4b08069c7a7068b
 - http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/super-bowl-sex-trafficking-harmful_us_56b4e08be4b08069c7a7068b



February 12, 2017: "Your Love Keeps Lifting Me Higher"

Scripture: Song of Songs 8: 6-7 (NRSV) – aka Song of Solomon

⁶ Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm;

for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave.

Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame.

⁷ **Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.**

If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned.

Synopsis: We read Song of Songs as a poem of two lovers, and it is, but it also reflects how deeply God loves each of us.

Felt need: To know how deeply God loves me.

Visuals: Marc Chagall “Song of Songs” paintings did not appeal to very many people (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/Search/marc%20chagall%20song%20of%20songs>).

Media:

Activity: Write a note of “love and appreciation” to someone or give a gift in mission in honor of a loved one.

Children’s Time activity: Give valentines to kids to hand to adults.

Missions’ Carnation Sale: The Committee will definitely make sure the homebound receive carnations; they are not sure if it is worth continuing the sale. Our consensus was that it might be time to move on to something else. Possibilities: Valentine and candy? Paper flowers?

Music: (“Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher and Higher” by Jackie Wilson (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcwgCmEi9Jc>). If Diane or Betty changed the words slightly (God’s love keeps lifting me...”), could Michael score it for the choir to sing?

Music (resource materials): “Unchained Melody” (Righteous Brothers), “I Will Always Love You” (Dolly Parton or Whitney Houston), “My Heart Will Go On” (Celine Dion)

Celebration music: “How He Loves” (He is jealous for me... <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/68333/how-he-loves>)

Discussion points: 1) Valentine’s Day - Americans spent \$19.7 billion in 2016. 2) How might we bless our neighbors? MAP Supper House guests: Bring in new or gently used magazines and books for the Supper House free reading table. Hand out valentines on Tues., Feb. 7 and Wed., Feb. 8. Ross Park staff: Write notes of appreciation.

February 19, 2017: “Loving Is Giving”

Scripture: Matthew 6: 19-24 (MSG)

¹⁹⁻²¹ “Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moth and rust and burglars. It’s obvious, isn’t it? **The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.**

²²⁻²³ “Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. **If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!**

²⁴ “You can’t worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you’ll end up hating the other.

Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can’t worship God and Money both.

Synopsis: Our culture conveys that loving is getting and taking, but Jesus says that loving is giving and receiving. Whether its money, time, or skills and talents, we love through our actions and words.

Felt need: To consider our legacy to the world through giving

Visuals:

Media possibility: “Generous: The Heart of a Disciple.” Length: 0:18. Cost: \$10.

<http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/55553/generous-the-heart-of-a-disciple>. Comments: No thanks. It does have a nice image of the heart growing three sizes larger, much like the Grinch.

Children’s Time book: The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein

Activity: Noisy offering for missions.

Music:

Discussion points: 1) President’s Day: What kind of legacy did they leave? In Dana Perino’s book, And the Good News Is..., she reveals how Presidents George Bush and George H. W. Bush taught her how they dealt with insults and criticism by “forgiving and separating politics from the personal.” (p. 202). They treat people with honor, respect, and civility, understanding that only time would tell what their legacies would be. The younger Bush noted that he had read six books in the last year about our first president, surely a sign that one’s legacy is not set in stone. 2) Funerals: Pastor Mary hears about people’s legacies and how God’s grace has worked in their lives as she helps the families plan the memorial service. Why don’t we tell those stories while loved ones are alive? One exception is at retirement parties. For a more humorous take on funerals from a 7-year-old’s perspective, watch Michael Jr.’s video on laughing at church. The part about funerals begins at 3:35 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOHfM2jf5-k>). 3) Maya Angelou: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” 4) People remember moments. Erma Bombeck noted that she wished she had eaten popcorn in the “good living room.” 4) Mentoring is a good example of leaving a legacy which we might hear about while we are still alive. Pastor Mary’s noted how a son’s funeral remarks about his often absent father encouraged her to be fully present with her own kids (like in the car). Betty’s son-in-law really just wanted his father’s time when he was alive. When Karen’s readers found something difficult, they could repeat her admonition that “children do not die from too many words on the page.”

February 26, 2017: “Can We Really Change the World?”

Scripture: Mark 12: 28-34 (NIV)

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

³² “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ **To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.**”

³⁴ **When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.**

Synopsis: Love in the name of Jesus changes the world because it moves us to action based on our own experience of God's love rather than obligation. Love becomes our witness and attracts others to seek a relationship with God.

Felt need: To reaffirm our call to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world

Visuals:

Media (Lynne): Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" music video. Length: 5:03. Cost: Free.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PivWY9wn5ps>

Activity: Congregational act of service after each worship service:

- Blessing bags for homeless (canned soup, crackers, socks, hand sanitizer, toothbrush/paste in a 1-gallon Ziploc bag)
- Decorate sacks for Kids' Food Basket
- Lakeside Elementary School (formerly Bunker Middle School): Barb will contact the principal to find out if there is a onetime need we could fulfill.
- UMCOR Health kits: We have assembled the birthing kits and health kits before. Could we request supplies during the series and assemble them on the last day?

Music: "Pass It On" (UMH 572); Eric Clapton's "Change the World"
<https://vimeo.com/67936383>

Discussion points: 1) Lent begins on March 1. For some history of Mardi Gras, which precedes Lent, visit https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/01/06/the-obscure-origins-of-american-mardi-gras-which-begins-today/?utm_term=.866f7d331e31. For some current news visit <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/01/07/mardi-gras-season-kicks-off-in-new-orleans.html>. 2) Pastor Mary would like to hear stories of service that changed us and the world. 3) Karen was embarrassed to not see how badly one of her own students needed shoes until his duct-taped shoes were literally in her face as he climbed up into the reading loft. The same was true for his sister's shoes. Trying to be fully present for their emotional and education needs can't mean overlooking physical needs. 4) Diane relayed stories of how she had more compassion for her students once she had done a home visit and could see what they went through every day. 5) Molly's gift of \$20 to her homeless friend for a security deposit still sticks with those of us who heard it.