**God Loves You And…..**

**1 John 4:7-12**

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Do you recognize this man? He just celebrated his 70th birthday. For thirty-three years, until just two years ago, he was on television every night. Late at night. Maybe this will help. Yes, friends, that’s David Letterman. Just in case you don’t know – David Letterman was a late night talk show host. The forerunner to Conan O’Brien and Stephen Colbert. He was very quick, very funny, and possibly best known for his crazy top ten lists. In his years on television, Letterman presented 4,605 top ten lists - things like the Top Ten Dog Excuses for Losing the Dog Show and the Top Ten Things That Will Get You Kicked Out Of Disney World. Because of him, top ten lists have become a national craze. On the internet, there are literally hundreds of them – there are top ten lists for everything. I’m sure there is even a top ten list of Letterman’s top top-ten lists!

So, confirmands, in the spirit of David Letterman, today I am going to share with you a top ten list of my own – mine just won’t be as funny. But, first, I want to tell the congregation a little bit about how you got to this Confirmation Day. A few years ago, we changed our Confirmation process from a one-semester, traditional Confirmation class to a two-year class we call Explorers. It’s called Explorers for a reason. We tried to design a curriculum that would help youth explore different aspects of faith and United Methodism- theology, Christian history, similarities and differences with other faith traditions, the ideas of John Wesley as well as some of the tough questions of faith. We hoped that in Explorers, students would learn how to think about faith for themselves.

These twenty-four youth have been through the whole two-year cycle, and you can imagine that they’ve learned a lot. But, sometimes the more you learn, the more confusing things get. That’s the reason for this top ten list – let’s see if we can boil the whole two years down to the top ten things to remember as you move on in your journey of faith – no matter how old you are. Drum roll, please…

#10 **There is not just one right answer**– Different people understand the Bible, God, Jesus, and faith in different ways. In fact, we ourselves will understand those things differently at different times in our lives. How you think about God today may not be the same as the way you think about God in twenty years. Faith grows and changes over time, and that’s okay. People don’t always agree about religion, and that’s okay, too. Don’t let anyone tell you that you have to believe what they do.

#9 **God Is Not A Human Being** – Okay, maybe that sounds obvious. God is God, not one of us. But, here’s the thing. For centuries, humans have gotten into trouble by assigning human motivations and emotions to God. It’s called anthropomorphizing God. Of course, it’s the natural thing for us to do. How else can we even begin to understand a God who is so much bigger than we can even imagine? But, when we make God human then we start thinking things like God is punishing people for behavior we don’t like or that God is playing games with our lives or that God dislikes the same people we dislike. And when we believe God can do those things, then we think it’s okay for us to do them, too. It’s not because…

#8 **We Are All Made In God’s Image** – All people are made in the image of God. It’s right in Genesis – God made humanity in God’s image. But, we already said God isn’t human, so how can we be made in God’s image? What if, as the scripture we heard from First John says, God is love? Then, perhaps the image of God in us is that we are made to love and to be loved. You are infinitely capable of love. And so is everyone else. What does that look like?

#7 **Jesus is the perfect example of being like God** – That’s what Christmas is all about. God sent Jesus to show us how to perfectly live out God’s image in the world. In other words, to live perfectly loving lives. To be love in the world. If you’re ever not sure how to love or who to love, read about Jesus. Jesus loved his disciples – they were his friends and his students. And he loved his mother, of course. But, he also loved poor people and prostitutes and criminals and strangers. He loved them by accepting them, healing them, forgiving them, and standing up for them. Of course, we are not perfect at all of those things. We get scared of people who are different, we hold onto grudges, we make mistakes and hurt others, but that doesn’t mean God doesn’t love us. In fact…

#6 – **God always gives us another chance** – John Wesley believed that once we recognize that God is in our lives, and that God is love and God is good, we spend the rest of our lives learning to be perfectly loving. It is a process, and, of course, we screw up. Yet, God continues to forgive us so we can start again. That’s a lot what grace is about – that no matter what we do, God loves us and is waiting to forgive us and help us get back on the right path. That’s often what people mean when they call Jesus our savior. The word salvation means “to be made whole”. When we make mistakes, we hurt or break ourselves or others. And other people’s mistakes hurt us. Jesus saves us, in part, by showing us no sin, even crucifying someone, is beyond God’s forgiveness. When we believe in that forgiveness, we can let go of the past, and God’s love and grace make us whole again. Which is why…

#5 **Resurrection happens in our lives, too** – Of course, when we make mistakes or when others hurt us or when just rotten things happen in the world, we may fall into despair, sadness, depression, fear. Life can feel like Good Friday. The promise of Easter, the promise of Resurrection, is that no matter how awful it seems, God will pull us through to a new beginning. We can find joy and hope and love again. All that bad stuff doesn’t win. Love wins. Which leads to…

#4 – **Don’t Go It Alone** Life is hard sometimes. Faith is hard sometimes. That’s why we need church. We need community. We are made to grow and learn in community. When we are baptized, we are welcomed into the community. When we take Communion, it reminds us we are in community with God and Jesus and each other. Church should be a place where you feel you belong – no matter what. A place where you are safe and challenged, loved and never judged. A place where you can learn about faith and serve others - Where you can sort out what you believe, but…

#3 – **You Don’t Have To Leave Your Brain at the Door** – Back in the 1500’s and 1600’s, when humans were beginning to make all kinds of scientific discoveries, it became popular to think that if you are a thinking person, a learning, smart, or questioning person, you couldn’t also be a person of faith. Thank God, we’re getting past that! You don’t have to choose between science and religion. You don’t have to either believe or not believe. Your whole life journey will be about figuring out what you believe. Just keep asking questions because questions help you grow. In the meanwhile.…

**#2 – Membership Has Its Privileges – and responsibilities**– Today, you are becoming members of the church. You’ve been a part of this church for a long time – possibly your whole lives. But, today you will confirm your faith and become members. So, what’s going to be different? In some ways, nothing will change. We will love you whether you are members or not. You will belong in this church and always have a place here whether you are members or not.

I think there are a couple of things that do change when you become a member. One is that you promise to keep growing in faith and love, to keep coming back to God, to keep working at being the kind of perfectly loving person Jesus was. And the other is that you promise to participate in this community. To show up here, to love and care for the people you meet here, and to take seriously making decisions for this church. As a member, you will now have a voice and a vote when the church makes big decisions like adopting our welcoming statement or whether to become part of the sanctuary movement. Heck, you even get to vote on my salary. More importantly, you’re making a commitment to yourself and to God and to this church to help the church to change the world – to make our world a loving, safe, just and peaceful place.

So far, I haven’t really tried to rank my top ten list from least important to most important but the number one thing on my list, really is the most important.

The #1 thing I hope you remember as you live your journey of faith is– I need another drum roll, please…**God Loves You And…** How do we finish it? God loves you and…there’s nothing you can do about it. Christianity really is all about love – loving God, loving your neighbor, and claiming God’s love for you**.**

Right now, in this moment, God loves and accepts you exactly as you are. God loves you when you don’t feel lovable. God loves you when you doubt. God loves you when you make mistakes – no matter how big or small. God loves you when your heart is broken. God will love you when you’re old.

Throughout your life, God will love you. God will see the beauty in you. God will see the real you. God knows the good in you. God loves you. And your job, your calling, is to take that love and give it back to the world.

May it be so. Amen.