

# McCabe United Methodist Church

## "Scratches"

John 13:31-35: June 15, 2014

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Jesus said, *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another . . . by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

-John 13:34-35

This is the disciple test. If we love one another, we're disciples.

Now, Jesus makes it sound so easy. **Love one another.** No problem. But we all know that sometimes loving people isn't so easy. Sometimes, people aren't very lovable or nice. Sometimes, you and I aren't so lovable or nice!

My daughter Tracey had a cat named Melvin. Melvin, like most cats, was spoiled. Cats are like that. Dogs are much better! Anyway, when Tracey was still living with us, I remember talking to her one night and I noticed her hands and arms. They had scratches on them. **"Tracey,"** I asked, **"where did those scratches come from?"**

And Tracey replied, **"Melvin."**

**"Melvin,"** I asked?

**"Yeah,"** she said, **"I was playing with him and he scratched me."**

Isn't it amazing how that works? Tracey was being nice to Melvin. She was loving him and she was scratched in the process.

I think that happens a lot. In the process of being nice to someone . . . in the process of loving someone . . . we can get scratched or hurt. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been scratched or hurt trying to love someone?

Today, I'm going to tell you three stories. These stories are about the *scratches* we can get from trying to **love one another**. You be the judge. Is love worth it? Is loving one another worth the *scratches* we sometimes get?

The first story is a story about a United Methodist minister. He's a retired bishop now. His name is Woody White. Woody White is a black

man. I heard him tell this story several years ago.

He had just been appointed to his first church that was located in a blue collar neighborhood of a large American city. He was young and eager at the time and anxious to work for the Lord.

One day, a friend stopped by his office in the church and told Rev. White about a poor, little, old, blind lady who lived in the neighborhood. **"She's so poor,"** his friend said, **"that she can't afford to buy any more food this month."** There was maybe a week left in the month.

Rev. White remembered our passage from John. He remembered Jesus' command to **love one another**. He felt **'love'** for this poor, blind lady.

He went to a nearby store and bought some food. He bought two bags full of food with his own money. Now remember, he was a young minister at this time and he couldn't really afford it, but he felt **love** for this woman even though he had never met her.

He found her apartment and knocked on the door. This precious, elderly lady opened the door. Rev. White introduced himself and told her that he was the new minister of the Methodist Church down the street. He told her about the food he had brought. Could he come inside? She invited him inside her apartment.

Well, she couldn't see Rev. White or the food he'd brought, but she was grateful. She thanked him again and again.

They talked for a while. The blind lady mentioned that she didn't belong to a church. Rev. White did what any other red-blooded minister would do when he finds someone without a church . . . he invited her to come to his.

**"Thank you,"** this blind lady said, **"but I can't because I'm moving."**

**"Gee, that's too bad,"** the Rev. White said. **"Why are you moving?"**

And she said, **"Well, I'm moving because there's too many black people moving into the neighborhood."**

Do you see what I mean? Sometimes, love hurts, doesn't it? Sometimes, we get scratched for loving one another. It makes you wonder, did Jesus really understand his commandment to **love one another**? Did he realize that people could get hurt loving others?

Have you ever read Corrie Ten Boom's book, *The Hiding Place*? I read it a long time ago. It's a story about the Ten Boom family during World War II. Corrie was a young woman who had spent all her life in the quiet company of her family living in Holland. The Ten Booms were a close family. The father was a watchmaker. He was known as '*grandfather*' to all the neighborhood kids.

Almost overnight, life in Holland and Corrie's little town of Haarlam began to change. German soldiers were everywhere. Soon, Corrie and her family were forced to wear I.D. tags just to move around. Her family, friends and the other citizens, especially the Jewish ones were constantly being harassed by the Nazis. And then, the Jewish people started disappearing and the horrible stories about what was happening to them began filtering back to Corrie and her family.

In spite of all the risks involved, Corrie and her family began the suspense filled drama of hiding Jews who were destined for the concentration camps and ultimately their deaths.

Everything was working fine until one day when the Germans discovered what the Ten Boom family was doing. What happened next was a living nightmare for the Ten Booms. The family was brought to a concentration camp. First, Corrie's father died. And then, Betsy, Corrie's sister and best friend, died. Corrie, for her part, spent almost two years living in a concentration camp with all of its death and horror. What an awful price to pay for loving someone.

Two stories. They're almost completely unrelated to each other except for the *scratches*. The *scratches* of love. The *scratches* of trying to obey Jesus' command to **love one another**.

Without a doubt, both Corrie and the Rev. White would have been much, much better off minding their own business and keeping their love to themselves. But, they didn't. Why? Why did they bother?

Let me try and answer that question by telling you a third story. A family was out for a drive one Sunday afternoon. It was a pleasant afternoon and they were cruising at a leisurely pace down the highway. Suddenly, the two children in the back seat started yelling at their father. **"Daddy, daddy, stop the car! Stop the car!"**

**"Why,"** the dad yelled back, braking so hard that he almost drove off the road thinking something awful had just happened. **"Why,"** he asked again. **"What's wrong?"** **"There's a kitten on the side of the road,"** they answered together.

The father breathed a sigh of relief. **"So what? So, there's a kitten on the side of the road? What do we care? We're having a nice drive here."**

**"But daddy, you have to stop and pick it up,"** the kids replied.

**"No,"** the father said, **"I don't have to stop and pick it up."**

**"But daddy,"** they pleaded, **"if you don't stop . . . it'll die!"**

**"Well then,"** the dad said as his blood pressure started to rise, **"it'll just have to die! I'm not going back to pick up some stupid kitten."**

**"But daddy,"** the kids said, **"are you just going to let it die?"**

**"Will you two kids be quiet,"** he yelled. **"We're trying to have a pleasant drive here!"** **"Gee,"** they said, **"we never thought our dad would be so mean and cruel as to let a poor little kitten die."**

Finally, the mother turned to her husband and said, **"dear, you'll have to stop and go back, you know."**

And so he turned the car around and headed back to where the kitten was still sitting. He pulled off to the side of the road. **"You kids stay in here,"** he growled. **"I'll go and check it out."**

He walked up to the kitten. The poor thing was just skin and bone, sore-eyed and probably full of fleas. But, when he reached down to pick it up, the kitten, with its last bit of energy, bristled and arched its back and bared its teeth and claws: **"hiss, hiss,"** it went.

Carefully, he picked it up by the loose skin around its neck and brought it over to the car and said, **"Don't touch it! It probably has leprosy."**

They drove home and the children gave the poor little kitten several baths and about a gallon of warm milk. Then they approached their daddy once more. **"Daddy, daddy,"** they said, **"can we . . . can we let the kitten stay in the house, just for one night? Please? Just one night? We'll fix a place in the garage tomorrow. Please? Just for tonight?"**

**"Sure,"** the father answered. **"Why not? Let him sleep in my bed. I'll sleep in the garage."** He was still upset.

And so they fixed up a comfortable bed for the kitten. The kitten had pillows and blankets and toys. It was a place fit for a king.

One day, a few weeks later, the father walked into the house. It had been a long day for him and he was tired. Just then, he felt something rub against his leg. He looked down and there was the kitten. He reached down toward the kitten . . . carefully looking around to make sure no one was watching . . . he reached down and when the kitten saw his hand . . . it didn't bare its claws and teeth and hiss anymore. Instead, it arched its back to receive a caress.

You tell me: Was that the same kitten? No, it wasn't the same sore-eyed, skinny and frightened kitten that was on the side of the road. Of course it wasn't and you and I know what made the difference, don't we?

A long time ago, Jesus died on the cross for you and for me. We didn't deserve it. He didn't have to bother, but he did. People still say today, that if you look at his hands closely, you'll see that they are covered with *scratches*. *Scratches* of love. *Scratches* of loving us.

And that's the reason why you and I should **love one another**.