

Words to Live by
(printed in the Prague Times Herald on February 11, 2017)

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Words to Live By...what an auspicious title for the column written by the community's clergy and church leaders! Yet, what words would those be? A little encouragement perhaps? Possibly, a few cautionary words? I've never been too fond of judgment and condescension. I think we live in a remarkably different world than that of 20 years ago, or even just 10 years ago, I don't know if anyone knows exactly what words we need. I am sure many will try to offer several. This week it is my humble honor to offer a few from me, and I do not do so carelessly or thoughtlessly. I see this as an important task. So, I will offer three..."God loves you."

You can take these three simple words together and have that warm feeling of blessedness. You can also understand them from a different perspective...separately and for others. First "God" (or God first.) God, the one who spoke creation. The divine being that is seen in many ways, by many different people, sometimes of the same denomination, sometimes different people in the same church. This is not new. The early church had a difficult time coming to agreement on a statement or understanding of faith. There were so many different understandings, sometimes because of their experience, sometimes because of their leaders. This really shouldn't surprise us, although it does. How can any one person, church, denomination completely understand a God bigger than creation. This is why we need each other, to understand more about God than just the little view we have.

Next, "loves". We use the same word to describe the feeling we have for our children, parents, spouses, and the feeling we have for our favorite food or favorite location. I love my cabin in the woods and I love chocolate, neither of those loves equate to the love I have for my family. In the Greek, there were seven different words for love, just so you could differentiate a bit more. The love I am referring to today is a love so big and broad, we cannot fathom it. And this love is unconditional. Not that God is a big soft teddy bear that has no expectations of us, but God loves us despite our failings. God knows that without God, we make a mess of things, and with God, we sometimes get it wrong. Even in our efforts to ignore it, this love is still there—the unconditional, overwhelming, awe-inspiring love of God. We can choose to respond to it, or ignore it, but it never goes away.

Lastly, "you". You, whoever you are, I am talking about and to you. God loves and cares about you, and about your neighbor, and about that old couple down the street, and about the young man you call a punk, and the young woman whose conduct is called into question, the business person who thinks they have no time, and the unemployed who thinks they have no future, and the folks you see in church pews on Sunday, and the folks you do not, and those you love, and those you have a hard time loving. It is an easy thought that is difficult to understand—God loves you, but not just you, not just those who think and worship like you, not just those who look and act like you. Individually and collectively, God loves you.

These words, I think, are needed in our world today. There are too many things to tear us apart that in the light of God's love are irrelevant. There are too many divisions, and not enough understanding that the person we may judge the most is one of God's loves. Perhaps if we stop to understand this a bit more, the words Jesus' said, that the greatest commandment is to love God with everything we are and our neighbors (who is everyone) as we love ourselves, will sink in a bit deeper. And we will respond in love. We will love God. We will love all whom God loves, including ourselves. God loves you. Yes, I am talking to you.