

**Love in Action**  
**1 John 3:16-38**  
**April 21, 2024**  
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Michael Swaine lives in San Francisco. About fifteen years ago he came across a discarded a push pedal treadle sewing machine and had an idea. He was an art teacher and has worked with many different mediums from ceramics to fibers of all kinds. He wanted to give back to his neighborhood in a unique way, so he started a project he called “reap what you sew”. He built a cart to carry his sewing machine on and he pushed it up and down the street offering to mend people’s clothing for free. Michael saw it as a way to use his talent for good in other people’s lives.

Michael does it all for free. If someone offers him money, he asks them to give it to someone else in need. He now sets up shop every month in the heart of the tenderloin of San Francisco and mends clothing for strangers, especially people who may be living rough or who cannot afford to purchase new clothes, let alone pay to have someone mend a garment they own.

For Michael it is a small way he can give back to his community, helping mend the fabric of his neighborhood one friendly stitch at a time. Many people stop to see him each month, some to say hi, others to get some help with a mending needed and some to share in the companionship of a man offering a simple gesture of love for sewing and people.

This is one example of love in action that John’s letter speaks about.

Scholars who have studied this first letter speculate that news of a conflict

at one of John the Apostle's churches had reached him. So, he set out to write this document we call a letter. Really it is not written like a letter. It is missing all of the markings of a standard letter. No greeting, naming of audience or person intended for and is also missing any closing salutations and honorable mentions we find in other letters. Scholars believe that it may have been a written sermon that was sent around to a number of churches trying to address conflict, in fighting or lack of zeal to live according to the teachings of Christ and the Apostle John.

The writer expands upon many of the principles found in the Gospel of John encouraging the intended audience to live up to these principles, first lived out by Jesus as depicted in John's Gospel. He challenges the audience to live their lives as Jesus did, sacrificially and in community. He then goes on to question how anyone who is rich, or as in his words, "has the world's goods, can look upon their brother or sister in need and could still refuse to help them?"

With these two images in mind, he continues by encouraging the congregation to live their faith "not by word and speech, but in deed and truth". Reminding us that actions speak louder than words. We prove our faith in Christ not by the words we speak or the creeds we recite, but by the way we live our everyday lives.

If you recall at the beginning of Acts the church came together and shared all things in common to help meet the needs of the community. Faith begins in community and a sense of shared support of one another through life's ups and downs. We see in scripture that our faith is proven through our actions more than by our words. People will know we follow Christ by our love for one another.

When we put an over-emphasis on right beliefs versus right actions, we tend to segregate ourselves and see others as less worthy based on an arbitrary rule we impose. Our Christian faith calls us to come together through common acts of compassion and love. If I refuse to help someone because they are of a different religion, ethnicity or gender we deny the common humanity we share. We stop seeing them as God sees them, children of God.

Another aspect of this love in action is that we don't look at the size of the problem and feel overwhelmed to even try to address it. Rather we look at what gifts we have to offer as one small step towards a solution. Michael Swaine started with his talent and love of sewing and offered it to the community in a fun and unique way. He may have felt awkward at first, he may have even received some strange looks from others when he set up his cart on the street corner. But he kept at it. He had a gift that others needed help and he gave it away as a gift. Others opened up and before long he was creating a community and making friends.

He did not monetize his talents, he blessed others with a service that helps them make ends meet. In so doing he received something even greater in return. A safer, more friendly, and welcoming place he calls home.

John's letter to the churches is packed full of helpful ideas on how to be a better, more loving, and transformative faith community, that still holds true today. As a church, I realize that we are anxious about our struggling numbers and we want to regain the hundreds of members many of us remember. But let us not fall into the consumerism trap that influences so much of our world. Let us not monetize our faith. John's words today reminds us to be generous to one another. He points out that truly

generous people do not ignore the needs of others around them. When we see a need that we can fulfill or at least start to address we are showing love.

The story I shared earlier was a man with a generous heart. He looked not at the problems but rather what he had to offer. He sought out a way to offer that gift to meet a hidden, unnoticed need. In the process he created a bond to his community that treated others as equals. He gave and received freely out of love and a generous heart.

Let us not focus on the problems, but rather focus on the many gifts that God has blessed us with and give it away as a blessing to others that creates a kinder more loving community around us. Let us work to mend our community one stitch at a time.