

Sermon 6-7-2015

Text- 1 John 4:7-12

Title- What We Think About When We Think About Love

I want to begin today by celebrating what was given to our Generosity Weekend. Let me preface this by saying several years ago we decided that we were going to make it an annual practice to give away one week's offerings and contributions. The year we made this commitment, wouldn't you know, as the designated weekend approached, we were facing a serious budget shortfall. There were discussions about whether we should abandon the idea, or modify it, but it was determined that we would stay the course. Our belief, that God is the ultimate provider, was tested, and I'm so happy that we trusted Him. It was a huge moment for our church--we gave away that offering, every last dollar—and God faithfully met our needs as a church. He continues to do so today, and our prayer is that He will do amazing things through the individuals and organizations that will be receiving these gifts. It is our great joy as a church to respond to our God's generosity by being generous like He is. Last weekend, Harbor, you gave \$23,556.00! Let's celebrate that for a moment.

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

What do you think about when you think about love? The answer to that might send our brains in a thousand different directions.

I love chocolate & I love ice cream, which means I *really* love chocolate ice cream. But, on the love spectrum, my love for chocolate ice cream doesn't hold a candle to the love I have for my *wife*. I love my wife; I love my daughters, Aria and Meira and Ava. I love my son who hasn't even made his appearance into this world yet (2 weeks and counting!). I love my family. I love God. When you think about love, there is a wide range of meaning, isn't there?

This week we begin a series of messages that will challenge us to consider the way we think about things. "Fix Your Thoughts..." This title comes from Philippians 4:8 where Paul is concluding a letter to his friends with these words: "*And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise*". So when we say, "Fix Your Thoughts", we're referring both to our need for repairs in our thought-life, and to the focal point for our thinking. In Hebrews 12 the author tells us to "fix (our) eyes on Jesus."

Today we examine our thinking around “love.” “Love” is a significant word. It can be used as a verb—“I *love* you.” That’s an action. It can be used as a noun—“I’m filled with *love* for you.” So it’s the substance of our feelings. Love is a personal pronoun. I address my wife as: “Love” almost as often as I say “Jennifer,” and she addresses me in the same way. It’s almost an offhand reference, “Hey, Love, would you help me.”

(sidebar) The first time Jed (our lead pastor) and his wife, Beth heard Jennifer and I refer to each other as love they were mortified. “That would not work for us,” they said. Which is funny, because the first time my wife and I heard Jed and Beth referring to each other as “Babe,” we were mortified too. “That wouldn’t work for us,” we said. But here’s the thing, we all have pet names for our significant others and when we refer to them with these terms what we’re really saying is that we love them. Love can refer to a range of things.

What does God think about when He thinks about love?

We each place an array of meanings upon this little term: love, and so when it comes to our passage of scripture today, it’s important that we share a common understanding about what our author intended the word to mean. Did John want us to love each other the way we love ice cream, or did he want us to love each other the way we love our family, or was he referring to some other version of love? It’s an important distinction.

52 times, John mentions the word “love” in this short letter. That’s 52 times in 105 verses for an average of 1 every other verse. There are 30 mentions in chapter 4 alone.

Why would John repeat himself so often? Perhaps he was forgetful. After all he was an old man- maybe even in his 80’s when he wrote 1 John as well as his Gospel and forgetfulness is a sign of old age. But forgetfulness is not why John mentioned love so often. Of course not. It was because God’s people were having a tough time loving the *way* God does and loving *whom* God loves.

How about you and me?

Do we reflect the love of God?

That’s a difficult question but here’s why it’s worth considering-

To the degree that we camouflage God’s love, we hide His nature from people who quite often have grand misconceptions about who He is. Think about this. When you put your faith in Christ, you get a heart transplant—it’s the heart of God beating inside of you. He takes up residence in you heart. But people who have no clue what God is like will never get a picture of Him through us, unless we learn to express the heart of God in the way that we love others.

What is God really like, anyway? It's the same question people had 2,000 years ago. 2,000 years ago most people did not have a clue what God was like, because God's people had turned inward-- they hid His basic nature from others. So, God decided to put on human skin and live among us. John describes this for us at the beginning of his Gospel. *In the beginning was the Word*-that means communication- God's own self-communication. *And the Word was with God and the Word was God*- what He says is who He is. But then verse 14, *The Word became flesh and made His home among us*.

"Made His home among us" is translated from a Greek word meaning: "to set up a tent." I love the way the Message translates this verse. It reads, "*The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood*. That's what God did. He chose to live among us.

John goes on to write, "*We have seen His glory*"- you would do well, every time you read the word "glory," to translate it: "character." We have seen His "character." The character of the only one who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. But why did he come? What's the first reason? John explains in verse 18, *no one has ever seen God*- we haven't witnessed Him firsthand, we don't have a grasp for who He is- *but, in the Son, God has made Himself known*.

God chose to live among us. To reveal His true character, God became like us, so that we could understand what He is like. No one has seen God, but in Christ we get a picture of who He is. Jesus referred to it this way in John 10:30, "I and my Father are one." And in the upper room, John 14:9, Jesus states, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." Jesus has shown us what God is like.

God is like Jesus. Jesus, who touches the untouchable; Who includes the excluded; Who befriends the friendless; Who eats and drinks with sinners.

Jesus shows grace to the disgraced. He forgives failures and loves those whom others hated to love and loved to hate. God is love, and people caught it in Jesus' life- the way He walked and the way He talked.

But Jesus is not walking this earth today. So, today, how will people come to know, experience and realize what God is really like?

Let's return to 1 John 4 verse 12. 60 years have passed since Jesus commissioned His followers and ascended into heaven. By the time John writes these words, God's people have begun to splinter and encounter friction amongst each other. These people had not seen Jesus. They had not experienced first hand what God was like. To them, and to us, John writes, "*if we love one another God lives inside of us and His love is made complete in us*." "*Complete*," means that God's love has reached its intended goal in and through us.

1 John 4:19 says, “*We love because He first loved us.*” He planted His love inside of us through the Holy Spirit so that He could love others through us and they could and would know what He is like.

Jesus put it this way in the upper room (in John 13:34), “*A new command I give you, that you love one another the way I have loved you. And by this, all people will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

What does God think about when He thinks about love? Selfless love. Sacrificial love. Deferential love. That’s the kind of love we see personified in Jesus.

How does God intend for us to love each other? The way that Jesus did, that’s how.

This love is always unselfish. Would you benefit from a quick tutorial on unselfish love? (Not that I’ve perfected the art—my wife will tell you I’ve still got a long way to go. In fact, it could be said that I’ve constructed these pointers based on the feedback I’ve received from her over years of messing this area up. In this arena, let’s pray that the validity and efficacy of the teaching is not determined by the adroitness of the teacher.)

A. Love That Sees

This type of love *sees* the need of another.

(Unselfish love is not oblivious. It does not have blinders on.)

B. Love That Does

This kind of love *moves* to meet the need.

(We’re not talking about passive sentiment here. This is not love as a feeling- its love in action.)

C. Love That Has No Ulterior Motives

This type of love does not count the cost.

(It’s not saving the moment as leverage for reciprocation)

D. Love That *Does Not Classify*

It does not consider whether or not the person is worthy of having their need met.

(Deserving or undeserving is not a part of the equation. A love without cynicism.)

Whatever the need is, whomever the person is, however I can help. It may mean that I do not have the ability or the means to help, but I can connect another person who can.

And this love must always begin within the church. That's verse 20. It reads, *If anyone says...* Now I've done a study of that Greek word translated, "anyone," and guess what I discovered what it really means? Anyone. *"If anyone says I love God but hates his brother he is a liar."* He's deceptive. He doesn't deceive God, and may not deceive others, but he has deceived himself.

Oh, I know what you're thinking, "I'm off the hook because I don't despise anyone." But the Greek word translated "hate" had two meanings in the 1st century. One did mean despise, but the other, which is what it means here, the other means to neglect. To overlook. To ignore or bypass a person in need.

She had been married five different times and was living with a man to whom she was not married. Ignore her? Not Jesus. He gave her a new sense of worth, and in the Gospel of John, chapter 4, she's the only person who ever brought an entire village out to meet Him. How well do *you* love that kind of person?

He was a Jewish politician, employed by the Roman Caesar. He didn't care about people. He had no compassion for anyone. He cheated and exploited them again and again. He and others in his profession were banned from even being able to attend a synagogue anywhere in the world. To the Israelites, he represented the scum of the earth. Neglect him? Not Jesus. He saw potential others did not see. Jesus included him as one of the 12 apostles. His name? Matthew, who wrote one of the four Gospels. How well do *you* love the kinds of people with whom others will have nothing to do?

She was a very poor widow who put into the offering two of the least valuable coins of that day. Her gift was like putting 2 pennies into the offering boxes this morning. Bypass her? Not Jesus. He bragged about her. Oh, not in the amount of money but in her motivation, for she gave all she had to live on. How well do *you* love those who are very poor?

Our care, compassion and commitment to love must start with our brothers and sisters in Christ with need. But it does not end there. Galatians 6:9 says, *"As we have opportunity let us do good to all people"*.

Does this feel impossible? Does it seem completely out of reach? Don't forget that it's only through Jesus that such love begins to well up within us. He is the source of our eternal life and He is at work in our hearts. This is love. Its source is in God and it is manifest through the person and the work of Jesus Christ. He wants us to reflect His love, so He will equip us for this task. Let Him.

What does it look like when this begins to become a part of our lives? Each of us has abilities, gifts and talents and charisma that we can use for others. We need to leverage those things for those who are in need, for those in our workplaces, for those in our homes.

-Hospitality

If you have a home with a kitchen, you have an opportunity to show unconditional love to others. Every time you share a meal with another family or friend you are showing selfless love. Do you consider your home/kitchen to be a tool that you can leverage to love others?

-Time

We just held an event called Generosity Weekend where we encouraged people to give unreservedly to some local organizations that are doing well at doing good. But over the course of last weekend, not only did we give financially, but we headed out to work at The Wish Project, Living Waters, and My Father's House, three of our local partners. We also helped clean up a canal in Lowell, got our hands dirty assisting Mill City Grows, and served meals at Place of Promise.

It was an awesome weekend, but the reality is, each of those organizations require ongoing help to effectively meet the needs that they are addressing. We can't become content with simply serving during Generosity Weekend. We need to volunteer to serve at one of those organizations on a regular basis. Do you consider your time to be an opportunity to show unconditional love?

-Compassionate Care Team

Have you considered participating on this team? It will provide you with opportunities to meet the needs of others and to walk alongside them for support and encouragement.

-Personal Skills

If you have a particular skill set or ability, have you considered using it as an opportunity to show unselfish love to others? I recently noticed that the amp I use here on stage for worship sounded blown out. I pulled on one of our worship team members aside to show him because I knew he had some skill with electronics. He offered to take the amp home and within the week he had diagnosed the problem and repaired it. I don't have any skill with electronics, so I would have been at a loss to get the amp fixed on my own. My friend used his knowledge to help me out. That's unselfish love in action.

Last week during Generosity Weekend I had the opportunity to serve at Living Waters in downtown Lowell. We served meals to a group of people who live difficult lives, some of them without homes. After we were done serving lunch, I had the opportunity

to talk with Diane, who runs the ministry. I wanted to encourage her and let her know what great work she is doing. As we stood having our conversation, one of the individuals whom we had just served, approached us with two folding chairs in his hands. "I wanted to bring these over so you two could sit down to talk," he said. Diane replied, "Have you ever seen me sit down?" But then she paused. "Wait a second, we will sit down. We're going to sit down, ok Jeff?" And so the two of us continued our conversation sitting in the chairs that were provided to us out of unconditional love.

We all have the capacity to show unselfish love to others. To those in need. To our family. To our co-workers and the people we pass in the hall of our schools.

Pray about how God might be able to use you to meet the needs of others. Get creative.

Here's the thing. Loving others- caring for those in need, may never bring you fame, it may never result in wealth the way the world views wealth, but through your love, God's love is made complete!

At the beginning of this message I explained that when we camouflage God's love, we hide His nature from people who quite often have grand misconceptions about who He is. But the opposite is also true. To the degree that we display God's love, we reveal His nature to those who need to know that the God who created them loves them. Ephesians 5:1 says, *Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children and live a life of love.* That's the way people will learn what God is really like.