

**Heart of Love**  
**Lord's Prayer: Rooted & Grounded in Love**  
**February 14<sup>th</sup> 2016**

**Prayer**

This first Sunday of Lent we are reminded of your great love for us.  
Leaving the safe confines of heaven, and coming to earth, initiating the greatest rescue plan – rescuing us from the grips of sin and death.  
Redeeming all of mankind from the tyranny of sin.  
Setting in motion the redemption and renewal of all your creation.  
Jesus thank-you for showing us what love is like.  
You knew love would hurt, but you loved anyways.  
Thank-you for giving us the Word, your love letter.  
It reminds us that we are never alone.  
We can carry it with us wherever we go, our ripped jeans and and our ripped hearts. Deep within our soul.  
It reminds us that you are with us always, even unto the end of the age.  
Thank-you that your love will never let us go.  
This Lent we wait...we wait for Easter and all that it means for us as your followers.  
But ultimately we wait...  
We wait for you to take us home...  
We wait for us to truly find our home in you.  
**Amen.**

**Lent is so fitting that it falls on Valentines Day isn't it?**

**Lent is this building crescendo of love pointing to the ultimate act of love, in Jesus laying down His life for the world.**

**Big Idea: It's this reminder that we are all created to experience this love, be recipients of this love, and to live it out.**

**Brene Brown** says in the little clip put out by

"It makes total sense to me that Jesus would have to be the Son of God because people would want love to be like unicorns and rainbows so then God sends Jesus and you go O my God love is hard, love is sacrifice, love is eating with the sick, it's breaking bread with people ...love is trouble, love is rebellious. I was listening to this Leonard Cohen song and it goes "Love is not a victory march, love is a broken Hallelujah." That makes total sense to me. Love is not like hearts and bows. Love is very controversial really."

We so need to be reminded of what love is really like don't we?

Love requires vulnerability. It costs.

**One of the most profound thing I've heard is Jean Vanier's description of love in "The Work of the People."**

"Loving our enemies, loving those who are hard to love, is crazy. Scripture says He will turn our heart of stone into a heart of flesh. That sounds beautiful. But instead of saying heart of flesh you say a vulnerable heart, it sounds less exciting. And if you want to define vulnerability, as capacity of being hurt; so I'll change your heart of stone which is

protective, to a heart where you will be capable of being hurt, that sounds less exciting. But that's the reality. Because if we really start being concerned about people, and loving people, it's inevitable that we will be hurt. So growth then means how to grow through being hurt?"

We've got it so upside down. Our culture has it so upside down.

We were reminded last CWG that love, the Trinity, is at the centre of the universe.

But there's lots of confusion in our culture what love is.

We were watching Cold Play during the Half-Time show of the Super-Bowl, and the closing words of the show were Believe in Love.

Beautiful words. People know inherently that they are true words, but I wonder how everyone would define that statement?

Partly because our English language only has one word for love. I love Mt. Biking, I love coffee, and I love my kids and my wife.

It's a little off isn't it?

Unlike the English language, the ancient Scriptures had multiple words for love.

One of these ancient words is the word Eros – which is where we get the idea of erotic love. The aspect of Eros love is vital in any healthy marriage but it isn't the glue that will keep people together.

The other was this word Feleo love, which means the feeling of fondness for one another, friendship or deep liking. This is something very important in any relationship, which is easy to lose sight of in any relationship. Therefore it needs to be guarded, and cultivated.

I find the older I get the more deliberate I need to be when it comes to pursuing friendship, and cultivating feleo love.

But the centerpiece, what we see modeled in Jesus is Agape.

Our world tells us that love is often seen as a need, something we get from others. Agape is the opposite. Agape gives and gives no matter what. It is unconditional love. Like Brene says, it's radical, it's costly, it's rebellious.

Agape doesn't love somebody because they're worthy. Agape makes them worthy by the strength and power of its love.

Agape doesn't love somebody because they're beautiful. Agape loves in such a way that makes them beautiful.

That's the thing about Agape. Agape doesn't need a reason.

So which definition of love does our culture gravitate to? Listen to the radio, or the top 40, and one theme seems to rise to the top.

Is it ...

**Eros**  
**Feleo**

## Agape

### You ever wonder why that is?

#### Q&A – why do you think that is?

- Perhaps because it's the easiest.
- Instant gratification?
- It's the best cover for how weak we are in the other areas of love?
- After all we can't give what we haven't experienced ourselves.

To truly love involves such a cost doesn't it? It is risky because it requires vulnerability. Openness. Trust.

There's no guarantee that you won't be hurt.  
Think about Jesus leaving the safe confines of heaven and coming to earth. Think of the risk. The cost.

#### The words of **Philp. 2:6-9**

"Though He was God. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Instead he gave up His divine privileges, he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When He appeared in human form, He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."

Obedience – flows out of His intimacy with the Father.

Therefore God elevated Him to the place of highest honour and gave him the name above all other names..."

This is love. Being open. Vulnerable. Willingly entering the darkness, the cost, and the pain.

So often we look at this passage and conclude that this self-emptying that Jesus did when coming to earth was a sort of one off, temporary action on His part, just to get the job done.

But what it is revealing about God's character goes much deeper.

**Darrel Johnston** suggests that Jesus' self emptying, the action of not grasping at, or not clutching at his equality with God, but rather letting go of it, so he could take on the very nature of a slave, is not so much a temporary activity but more likely revealing to humankind just who God actually is.

That at God's very core is this servant God. This servant heart. "Jesus said I did not come to be served, but to serve, and give my life a ransom for many."

In Jesus we see a God who serves with a basin and a towel.

A God who washes feet. Hands, head and heart.

A God who reveals the very nature of who God is by taking on the nature of a servant.

A God who lays down His life.

Love is courageous. Love is sacrifice. It's rebellious...rebellious against status quo.

Huge implications for our lives; because if this is indeed who God is, and we are created in God's image, are we not to follow suit.

Is this not what it means to love like Jesus loved?

No wonder Paul begins the text with these words.

**You must have the same attitude that Jesus Christ had..."**

**We are loved so that we can love...**

**Parker Palmer** says this about love.

"The only way to get out of it is to get into it. The only way to deal with the darkness is not to try to walk around it, or turn your back on it, and pretend it isn't there, but to go deeper into it until you see a little bit of light and a little more light."

This is the way of the cross. The way of love. This is Agape.

Jesus cried out to His Father, "Is there another way? Can you take this cup of suffering from me?"

He was grappling with what was about to come. But in the end he surrendered to His Father...

I believe He was tempted to walk around it, bypass the cross, but instead He dove in deep.

"Yet not my will but yours."

The thing is, if this is the way Jesus loved, it will be the same for you and I.

To love this way is hard. It is courageous. Rebellious.

Something we don't do very well as humans. Left to our own devices fall short often don't we?

Why we so desperately need Jesus' Spirit living and loving through us.

But it requires surrender doesn't it. Surrendering our Will to His control.

The ultimate example of Agape Love as modeled in Jesus is **Romans 5:6-11**

"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

What a statement.

Want a beautiful expression of God's unconditional love.

good definition of what it means to stand in our brokenness and let God love us, this is it.

While were knee deep in our mess, so deep we could never do a self rescue...just in the nick of time...God sent His Son to clean up our mess...to save us.

God knew the mess of sin was way too deep, way too damaging, way too complex, we couldn't possibly clean it up, or fix it on our own.

So this is where we are given a choice. Try to earn God's love. Try to work our way to heaven...pay for the wages of our sin ourselves, or surrender to His love...and receive.

Stand in our brokenness and let God love us.

We love to think we can fix our own mess don't we? It says a lot about how we see our sin and brokenness in the world doesn't it?

I wonder if we have to minimize our own brokenness and sin, because our version of God's love is so lacking.

We can't fathom the thought of God's Holy love; a God who would love so extravagantly, so we minimize our own sin in order to close the gap.

Make His love less audacious. Less divine. More human.

**Meister Eckhart**, one of the church fathers, says this about God's love.

"Know that God loves the soul so powerfully that it staggers the mind. If one were to deprive God of this, so that He did not love the soul, one would deprive Him of His life and being, or one would kill God, if we may say such a thing."

**God's love is supposed to stagger the mind.**

**Martin Luther** drives this thought home.

"Therefore sinners are beautiful because they are loved; they are not loved because they are beautiful."

While we were still sinners Christ died for us.

I don't know if you have been grappling with this idea of standing in our brokenness and letting God love us.

It's difficult to do. We so want to clean up our own mess.

Somehow work hard in order to make us loveable and presentable to God. Try the best to be good on our own.

**I grew up believing the opposite of what Martin Luther wrote – not that I'm beautiful because I am loved but I'm loved because I'm beautiful.**

**I've told you the story about the words I heard from my mom when I was in grade 4. Just moved to a new school and was having a lot of trouble making friends; getting into scraps with Scott Zomar and Allan Wall. Two real trouble makers I tell ya.**

**I remember coming home after one of these fights, and I was pretty beat up. I understand my mom, she was likely a bit frantic...panicky and wanted to fix the problem.**

**So out of her own brokenness she told me that if I just lost weight I would make friends.**

**That is the wrong thing to tell anyone. Especially an image conscious teenager.**

**But of course this was nothing new for me.**

**It didn't help that every time my grandfather saw me, he would make one of two comments.**

- i. **You've gained weight.**
- ii. **You've lost weight.**

**Not healthy way of thinking. I grew up pretty body conscious.**

**I already believed the lie that I had to do something valuable and accomplish enough to feel successful and worthwhile. I already believed the lie that if I perform in an outstanding way, if I won the admiration and affirmation of others, I then my life would be whole.**

**I already believed that to get love and approval I had to achieve success and do what I could to maintain a good image.**

**I already believed that. This only drove that lie deeper.**

**You might be different. We all have different personalities so it will look different for each of you.**

Some of you believe the lie that you have to get things absolutely perfect to be loved. You live with such high standards of being correct.

This is the perfectionist.

Some believe you have to give and make sacrifices in order to be loved. So you over-extend yourself all the time. Just to have the approval of others.

Some of you have a need to be special, and different, and unique in order to be loved and valued. So if you're not radical, living on the edge...you don't feel you have worth.

Some of you are thinkers and you live with the pressure to understand and master everything. You have to learn all there is about the subject in order to feel value.

You have to smart. Brilliant even.

For some of you it's all about feeling secure and stable. Your focus is what could go wrong or be dangerous. If you feel insecure you wonder if God loves you.

We're all different...it looks different for each of us.

**For me, I had to look a certain way to get approval...**

These childhood experiences only drove my core lie even deeper.

### **So how did I carry that into my relationship with God?**

I have to look a certain way in order to be loved. As a result I saw all my imperfections, and didn't feel very good about myself at all.

But this was only half the story.

In order to get my dad's attention I felt I had to do the job just perfectly.

So when He asked me to mow the grass I would work extra hard...I would mow, trim and sweep.

I would mow at an angle sometimes. I would even mow criss-cross so the yard looked like a checkerboard.

I should have been a greens keeper for the local golf-course! I missed my calling.

Then I'd go inside and wait for my dad to come home. I'd wait on pins and needles for my dad to say something. Tell me he noticed...

So now what do I do? How does that translate to my Christian walk?

### **I call it my six-pack spirituality...**

It's gonna be the title of my book one day.

I would treat my devotional life the same way I used to work out. The same way I'd mow the grass.

I had to do it perfectly...

I would read my bible – nothing wrong with reading your bible – its good and necessary – remember, its God's love letter...

But I was treating it like a manual to get God's love.

I had forgotten that God already loved me.

Instead of simply coming to God in my brokenness and sin, I would treat the disciplines as a way to clean up the mess; somehow make myself presentable and lovable to God.

If I felt especially ugly emotionally, physically or spiritually I would work out.

If I felt especially broken and needy spiritually and emotionally, rather than run to God and let Him simply love me, I would work extra hard so I could feel good about myself.

Rather than simply stand in my mess, and let God love me, I would work hard to make me feel good about myself.

What happens if our obedience is all wrapped up in our attempt to please God, not simply as coming to God as dearly loved children who bring pleasure to God?

It distorts the obedience. It distorts the relationship.

I like how **Donald R Hands and Wayne Fehr** put it in their book "Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy".

"The discovery that one is loved by God must eventually take priority over all other ways of relating to God...until one

discovers this primal truth, human life will be distorted and driven. In fact, all else should follow from the deep knowledge that one is loved.”

I’ll never forget the time I felt God tell me that my bible reading was sin. And that I needed to stop.

He was simply inviting me to come to Him as I was, and not try to do anything to make myself appear better than I truly was.

This was God’s invitation way back then, to simply stand in my brokenness and let God love me.

Geoff gave a beautiful picture a few weeks ago of him standing in the doorway, the archway into God’s throne-room, and the picture was Geoff just leaning up against the doorposts and resting in God’s presence.

Not working; not busy...not frantic...not having to do anything in order to be loved...just being still.

Such a picture of security. Secure in God’s love. That’s what God is inviting us into.

### **While we were still sinners Christ died for us...**

I have begun to practice centering prayer....just resting in God’s presence and not doing a thing.

What I often quote or use to bring me back is this phrase.

“Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me a sinner.”

It reminds me of where I came from, and my continual need for Christ’s mercy and grace. That prayer is not about me, it’s about God.

It reminds me that I don’t need to be perfect, or do anything to gain his mercy. I just need to remain open. And receive.

Its in that place I am reminded that nothing can separate me from Christ’s love...

It’s in that love I can explore the depths of my own depravity and rest secure in His love.

That at my worst, Christ pursued me, and continues to pursue me.

So for Paul love is not an idea for Paul...not even a motivational factor for right behavior. It is behavior. To love is an action word.

God showed his love...

To love is to act; anything short of action is not love at all.

You might wonder today if God could ever love you.

You wonder, how could God ever love this aloof, fickle, ambivalent ...

Yet God opened His heart.

He knew he would get hurt...

Yet loved anyways.



Christ came absolutely vulnerable...as vulnerable as it gets.

As a baby, human, God made flesh...the bible says as a servant – it doesn't get any more vulnerable than that. He came with the capacity of being hurt.

And His vulnerability had a great cost.

Even death on a cross.

All so our friendship with God can be restored. Our communion with God, this holy God is restored.

So much so that we are now called friends of God.

So Christ's vulnerability brought life. Redemption. Healing...

It is through Christ's willingness to get hurt that redemption was made possible for all of creation.

So this is the sort of love Christ is inviting us into this Valentines / this season of Lent.

**Big Idea: We are created to experience this love, be recipients of this love, and live it out.**

**Application:**

How do you relate to God? What do you feel you have to do in order to feel loved?

Anything?

Is it easy for you to rest? Or do you often find yourself restless in God's presence...having to do stuff.

Are you trying to gain God's love?

Are you trying to win His approval? His applause? Trying to get Him to notice you?

What if you already have his full attention and love? What if in Christ His first thought towards you is pleasure and delight?

What if there's no mess to clean up, what if Christ did it all on the cross for you, so you can know the full extent of His love?

So how do we love that way? So how do we grow in this action word called love?

**Open you heart to His unconditional love.**

**Only He can turn our heart of stone into a heart of flesh...**