

TOGETHER WE FIND LOVE

Someone once wrote: If you love something, set it free. If it comes back to you it is yours. If it does not come back, it was never yours to begin with. If it just sits in your living room and messes up your stuff, eats your food, takes your money and is always giving you attitude then you either married it or gave birth to it!

Today we are continuing in our series Together and I want to talk with you about love. The Beatles sang 'All you need is Love.' Dionne Warwick sang 'What the world needs now is love, sweet love.' Elvis sang 'I can't help falling in love with you.' Foreigner sang "I want to know what love is.' Huey Lewis sang about 'The power of love' and the J Geils band just sang 'Love stinks.' If we really want to understand what love is we need to ask the author of love.

I want us to look at a passage of scripture this morning that talks about what true love really is. It is God's way of reminding us all today that what the world calls love is a cheap imitation.

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge -- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

1. Love brings CONVERSION – dwell in your hearts through faith

Paul prays in verse 17 that God would strengthen us with power so that the love of Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith. That means salvation. The love of God draws us to salvation and results in transformation.

John 13:34-35 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jesus said that love was attractive. It is evangelistic. When people truly see love lived out in a community of faith and then experience the love of God personally it draws them to Him. People long to be loved. They instinctively understand their need for authentic sacrificial love.

Love for God and ones neighbour constitutes the sum of Gods requirements for the Christian. The man who loves needs no counselling. Love cements relationships between God and man and man and man. While love attracts, fear repels. When love gives, lust grabs. What love builds, hatred destroys. With love communication flourishes; with resentment it withers. Love is the ultimate answer to all the problems of living with which the Christian counsellor deals. Love therefore is the goal -- Jay Adams, The Christian Counsellors Manual

As I said at the beginning, often all we see in life is a cheap imitation of God's perfect love. In the 1986 "Crocodile Dundee" movie, Dundee is, of course, from Australia and visits New York City for the first time. As best I recall, he is being accompanied by a female newspaper writer and suddenly finds himself cornered by a gang of young thugs. When Crocodile Dundee does not give them his wallet, one young hoodlum pulls out a switchblade and threatens Dundee. Crocodile Dundee simply reaches behind his back, while saying, "that's not a knife," and pulls out a large Bowie-type knife, saying, "THIS IS A KNIFE!" So what is real love?

1 John 4:9 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.

This is love. Perfect, sacrificial love. This is the love that God has for you. More than 100 years ago a nurse at an insane asylum in the US was cleaning out the room of a man who had just died. They were readying the room for the next inmate when they found something scrawled on the wall of the room. It was the following words;

Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade:
To write the love of God above Would drain the ocean dry, Nor
could the scroll contain the whole Though stretched from sky to sky.

The poor man that had lived in the room in a rare moment of clarity had understood his condition and had poured out his simple heart of love to God. The words were not his own. He was quoting the words written by a Jewish songwriter more than 1000 years before. The story was published in a magazine. An evangelist doing a camp meeting read the story and shared it one night. In the audience was a man named Frederick Lehman. A few years later in a difficult season of ministry he pulled out those words he had written that night and added two additional stanzas which became the song 'The Love of God' which has touched the hearts of many people through the years.

The love of God, experienced and then lived out by believers in Christ is a powerful witness. It is like a light shining in the darkness.

When Benjamin Franklin wished to interest the people of Philadelphia in street lighting, he didn't try to persuade them by talking about it or insisting that they do it. Instead, he hung a beautiful lantern on a long bracket before his own door. Then he kept the glass brightly polished, and carefully hung it at the approach of dusk. People wandering about on the dark street saw Franklin's light a long way off and came under the influence of its friendly glow with grateful hearts. To each one it seemed to say; "Come along, my friend! Here is a safe place to walk. See that cobblestone sticking out? Don't stumble over it! I shall be here to help you again tomorrow night, if you should come this way."

It wasn't long before Franklin's neighbors began placing lights in brackets before their own homes and soon the entire city awoke to the value of street lighting and took up the matter with interest and enthusiasm. They were attracted to it because they saw the difference that it made. Love draws us.

2. Love brings CONNECTION – together with all the saints

Paul prays in verse 18 that the church in Ephesus, being rooted and established in love would have power, *together with all the saints* to truly understand the dimensions of God's love. The prayer is that we would not simply experience the love of God personally but that we would experience it in the context of community. A love for God results in a love for God's family.

1 John 4:7-12 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.

When we love God we also love God's family. We were not created to live the Christian life alone. We were built for community. We need each other. We are connected to one another. Because we are connected, when one part of the body is hurt we all feel it.

It is like the story of two guys sitting in a rowboat that has a leak. The water is coming in and the one person is bailing but the other is not. When asked why he is not also bailing he says "Well, it's not leaking at *my* end of the boat." When one hurts, all hurt.

A mouse looked through a crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife opening a package; what food might it contain? He was aghast to discover that it was a mousetrap! Retreating to the farmyard, the mouse proclaimed the warning, "There is a mouse trap in the house, there is a mouse trap in the house." The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, "Mr. Mouse, I can tell you this is a grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me."

The mouse turned to the pig and told him, "There is a mouse trap in the house." "I am so very sorry for you Mr. Mouse," sympathized the pig, "but there is nothing I can do about it. Surely someone else will step in to help." The mouse turned to the cow, who said, "Sorry Mr. Mouse, but a mouse trap is not a danger to me. Deal with it on your own." So the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected to face the farmer's mousetrap alone.

That very night a sound was heard throughout the house, like the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey. The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness, she did not see that it was a venomous snake whose tail was caught. The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital. She returned home with a fever. Now everyone knows you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup's main ingredient. His wife's sickness continued so that friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them, the farmer butchered the pig. The farmer's wife did not get well, in fact, she died, and so many people came for her funeral the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide meat for all of them to eat.

So the next time you hear that a brother or sister in Christ is facing a problem and think that it does not concern you, remember that when the least of us is threatened, we are all at risk. When one part is hurting, we all hurt.

Recently I had a toothache. It is amazing how such a small part of my body could make it so miserable for all the rest! We are connected. A love for God results in a love for one another. Love brings conversion and love brings connection;

3. Love brings COMFORT – to *know* this love

Paul continues in verse 19 to pray that the church in Ephesus would not only understand God's love intellectually but that they would experience God's love first hand. Understanding and experiencing are different. You can know a lot about something without ever really experiencing it.

An author named Charlie Shedd once said, "Before we had kids I use to travel across the country teaching a lecture I called 'The Ten Commandments for Raising Perfect Kids' - that was before I had kids. After he and Martha had their first child, he changed it to "Ten Hints for Parents". After their second child, he relabeled the lecture, "A Few Tentative Suggestions For Fellow Strugglers." He said after the arrival of the third child he gave up speaking on the topic altogether.

Let me ask you, would you rather receive parenting advice from someone who is unmarried and has never had kids or from someone who has struggles raising kids just like you and through those trials has seen their kids turn out great? You would probably go with the one with experience right?

One of the ways that we experience God's love is through community. We are the hands and feet of Jesus. A primary way that God ministers to us through other people. Look around this room today. I can guarantee you that whatever you are going through in your life right now, there is someone else in this room that has gone through it as well. No matter what the issue, health or financial or addiction or relational or parenting... there are people here that have first hand experience with what you are going through. That is comforting, isn't it.

The problem is that a lot of people have not yet realized that their greatest struggle and challenge is also their greatest ministry. They suffer in silence, seeing these challenges as something that brings them down as opposed to something that, with God's help, they can use for good.

God created love to be something that you only receive it when you give it. The more you give, the more you receive. One of the amazing things you will find is that when you reach out to help another person that you yourself are ministered to.

There is an old Jewish legend that once there were two brothers who shared a field and a mill. Each night they dividing the grain they had ground together during the day evenly between them. One brother lived alone; the other had a wife and a large family.

Now, the single brother thought to himself one day, "It isn't fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have only myself to care for, but my brother has children to feed." So each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary to see that he was never without. But the married brother said to himself one day, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has no one. What will he do when he's old?" So every night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary. As a result, both of them always found their supply of grain mysteriously replenished each morning.

Then one night they met each other halfway between their two houses. They suddenly realized what had been happening and embraced each other in love. The legend is that God witnessed their meeting and proclaimed, "This is a holy place—a place of love." It is said that this threshing floor became the site on which the First Temple is said to have been constructed. Love brings conversion, connection and comfort;

4. Love brings COLLABORATION – filled with the fullness of God

Lastly, Paul prays at the end of verse 19 that the church would not only know God's love but that they would be filled with God's love and power. That they would not only experience God's love but also that they would experience the fullness of God's power flowing out through them in their lives. When God gifts us it for a purpose. Our gifts are not for our own benefit but for the benefit of others around us. When we are full of the Holy Spirit we serve in the places that God has gifted us to serve. Love brings collaboration.

God created us all different. We all have different gifts and abilities and experiences to share. When each person does their part, everything gets done.

In a certain mountain village in Europe several centuries ago, a nobleman wondered what legacy he should leave to his townspeople. At last he decided to build them a church. No one saw the complete plans for the church until it was finished. When the people gathered, they marveled at its beauty and completeness. Then someone asked, "But where are the lamps? How will it be lighted?"

The nobleman pointed to some brackets in the walls. Then he gave to each family a lamp which they were to bring with them each time they came to worship. "Each time you are here the area where you are seated will be lighted," the nobleman said. "Each time you are not here, that area will be dark.

God has given each one of us a gift. We have something to contribute. Whenever you fail to use what you have been given, a part of the church is dark. We are better together.

Saint Jerome recounts that The Apostle John lived in Ephesus after surviving exile to the Island of Patmos. In his extreme old age, would be carried into the church by his disciples. He had no strength for lengthy exhortation, but could only say, Let us love one another. At length, the disciples and church members who were there, wearied by the repetition, asked, "Master, why do you always say this?" He replied "Because it is the Lord's command and if that alone is done, it is enough."

Today that command is still with us – Love One Another. We all have different likes and dislikes. Some like more lively worship while others like more conservative. What do you say? AGAPOMEN ALLELUS - Let us love one another! Some are from one cultural background, others are from another -- what do you say? AGAPOMEN ALLELUS - Let us love one another!