

## WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

John 15:9-17

Jesus wasn't talking only to mothers when he said it, but what better text could we find for Mother's Day: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love!" (John 15:9) Jesus' words are for all of us – mothers and fathers; grandmothers and grandfathers; daughters and sons; siblings and friends. Because God loves us, we are able to love one another. Because God forgives us we can forgive one another. Because God trusts us, we can trust one another. At the very core of the Gospel (the Good News) is the self-giving love of God.

I'd like to lift four things from our text for today that I think Jesus wants to teach us about love.

First of all, notice **THE LINK BETWEEN LOVE AND HAPPINESS**. Jesus says to his disciples, "These things (about love) have I spoken to you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be complete." (John 15:11)

The late Dr. E. Stanley Jones, in his book, "Growing Spiritually", tells a parable about a man who lived a fantasy life. All he had to do was think of something and "poof", it happened. So this man sticks his hands in his pockets, leans back and imagines a mansion. "Poof" he has a fifteen-bedroom mansion, with three stories and servants available to wait upon his every need. Of course, a place like that needs several fine cars. So again he closes his eyes and imagines the driveway full of the finest wheels money can buy. And "poof" several of the best vehicles instantly appear. He is free to drive them himself, or sit back and have the chauffeur drive him wherever he wishes.

When he comes back home from his drive, he wishes for a sumptuous meal and "poof" there's the meal in front of him with all of its mouth-watering aromas and beauty. But he eats the meal alone. It is about that he realizes there must be something more that he needs to find happiness. After a fairly short while he grows so terribly bored and unchallenged that he tells one of his attendants, "I want to get out of this mess. I need to create some things on my own again. I'd rather be in hell than be here." To which the servant replies quietly, "Where do you think you are?"

So, what does it take to be happy? Jesus didn't spell out the details, probably because the details vary with individual needs. But Jesus did make this clear: No one can really be happy if she or he is not in a proper relationship with God and with other people. It is hard to be really happy when you live only for yourself.

C. S. Lewis was pretty much doing that – living only for himself – until he gave his heart to his beloved Joy. Some of us studied Lewis' life last summer in the adult Bible class. Others of us have seen his story in the movie "Shadowlands". Lewis writes perceptively and extensively about love: "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will

become unbreakable impenetrable, irredeemable ... The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love ... is hell.”

In his unique way, Lewis is saying to us that, where there is no love, there is no happiness.

Jesus says to his disciples, and to us, “These things I have spoken to you ... that your joy might be complete.” (John 15:11)

Then, our Lord had a second point to make about love: **LOVE REQUIRES SACRIFICE**. He explained it like this, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

Do you know the story of Princess Alice, the second daughter of Britain’s Queen Victoria? Alice had a four-year-old son whom, like any mother, she loved very much. When he contracted the disease known as “black diphtheria”, Alice was devastated. The disease was highly contagious and very deadly. Not being in the best of health herself, the nurses constantly warned the Princess to stay away from her son. Naturally this would be very difficult for any mother. Still Alice knew she would be in danger if she ignored the warning.

One day as Princess Alice stood in a far corner of her son’s room watching him, she heard her son whisper to a nurse, “Why doesn’t mommy kiss me anymore?” That was more than Alice could bear. As tears streamed down her cheeks she raced to her son’s bed, held him in her arms and smothered him with kisses, reassuring him of her love. Tragically, this turned out to be the kiss of death. Princess Alice contracted the deadly disease and in a matter of weeks both mother and son were dead.

All of us who are parents can understand why Princess Alice did what she did. When you love, when you truly love, no sacrifice is too great.

Throughout history, one driving force that has moved humanity forward has been the willingness of parents to make almost any sacrifice to insure that their children would have a better life. But today a dramatic change seems to be taking place. Recent studies show that a sizable portion of parents put their own happiness before that of their children. Thus you have mothers on drugs who ignore their little ones. And you have fathers who go off in search of their own dreams, leaving their families to fend for themselves. No wonder so many families are in crisis today.

How can we as followers of Jesus Christ, ignore the model that the Gospel provides for us. “God so loved that he gave ...” (John 3:16) Where there is no giving there is no love. That is true within the family, that is true between and among friends and that is true within society. A society in which everyone is “looking out for number 1” is a society in big trouble.

Always remember, never forget – and I think this is the third thing of which Jesus would remind us: **LOVE IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF OUR FAITH**. In verse 17 of our text Jesus says: “These things I command you, that you love one another.” Paul would later write: “If I

have faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” (I Cor 13:2) That pretty well sums up the matter. If we cannot love, our faith is a sham!

Early one Saturday morning, on her way to her downtown office, Deborah Michel saw a crowd of onlookers surrounding a police officer lying wounded on the street. As she watched the ambulance carry him away, someone told her what happened. He had been shot by a street person. The officer died later that day, and Deborah became very upset by what happened, and her anger grew into hatred. She couldn't even look at a street person without blaming him for the officer's death.

As a Christian, Deborah recognized that she would somehow have to reconcile her anger. After much prayer, she decided that the best way to do this would be to work for the very people who made her angry. So the next week she volunteered her time in a soup kitchen at a downtown church. She spent hours serving hot meals to people who had no homes and no food. Writing for *The Upper Room*, Deborah said, “As I looked into the grateful eyes of the hungry recipients, my anger melted and I realized that each of these persons is a beloved child of God just as much as I am.” When she loved them unconditionally, as Jesus does, her anger evaporated.

You see, love is the very essence of Christian faith. If we are not able to love, then there is something very superficial about our faith. Admittedly, sometimes the most difficult people to forgive are those who are closest to us. But there is Christ, hanging on the cross. And who did he die for? He died for imperfect people; like you and me. How tragic if we can't forgive and accept those who love us, even as Christ has forgiven and accepted us.

So how shall we try to sum up what Jesus has to teach us about love and joy?

(1) Love and happiness are inseparable. If you don't have both, you probably don't have either.

(2) Love requires sacrifice. Therefore we must sacrifice in order to be happy.

(3) Love is hard. It does not come easily nor cheaply in this imperfect world. There is a sense in which any real love is tough love.

(4) Nevertheless, love is the central command that Christ gives to anyone who would be his disciple.

And that includes all of us. Doesn't it?

What's love got to do with it? Everything!

Let us pray: Loving Lord Jesus, as you have loved each one of us, imperfect as we are, help us to love one another, no matter what it costs. Amen.

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