

The Love of Christ

Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10

Reading: Ephesians 5:1-21

March 31, 2019

Love Perfected

If love for one another is going to flourish and grow in our church, we must be rooted more deeply in love. In other words, becoming a loving person means living with the roots of your love sunk deep in the love Christ has for you. Being loved by Christ is the fertile soil that grows the roots of our ability to truly love. Recognizing you are loved by Christ and the Spirit - also develops deep roots of faith. As Jesus taught, ⁸ “Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ... ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” (Matthew 13:8 & 23) So Christian love begins with God who loves his creation more than his own sacrifice. God loves us to such a degree he sent himself as Jesus to earth. Jesus’ love for us is greater than the love for his own life and he was willing to sacrifice himself that we may live. God the Father and God the Son love us so deeply that they give each believer the gift of themselves in the indwelling of the Spirit. John wrote in a manner to help understand this, ¹⁶ “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:16-18) True believers have come to know and believed the love which God has for us. The love that God has for us is the good soil in which grows our ability to becoming loving people and the root that we send down into that soil, to be nourished by it, is faith – or a Paul wrote “we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.” Believing the depth of God’s love for me and you is the key to our growing into a loving people.

Another key to believing the love that God has for us is seeing it revealed in the words of Scripture as Paul teaches in Romans, ¹⁶“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, in *Habakkuk (2:4)* ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Romans 1:16-17) Only a few people were allowed to see Jesus in the flesh, be with him, hear him teach, watch him heal people and see him suffer at the hands of men, to be put to death and rise defeating death. We might be envious of this privilege, but it was not God’s plan; his plan was not for the many and for generation after generation to base their faith on Jesus remaining upon the earth. This is clear by Jesus’ prayer for his disciples, ¹⁷“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸**As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.** ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰I do not ask for these only, **but also for those who will believe in me through their word,** ²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, **so that the world may believe that you have sent me.** ²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶**I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.**” (John 17:17-26) It was God’s plan before the creation that we come to faith, not by seeing Christ in the flesh, but by seeing the love of Christ in the lives of believers and in the scriptures and that we surrender our lives to His Word. Christ gave his words directly to a few and they have given Christ’s words to all believers in the New Testament until Jesus returns.

Love's Depth

Because of my need and our need to grow in love, here is the plan for the next 4 weeks. I hope this will help you spend more time in prayer and meditation for what will be coming. I hope it will help you know when God is moving you to invite others to attend church with you. My aim for the next 4 weeks is that our love for one another and for those outside of our church community that God has placed in our lives would grow and deepen. However, this will happen only as we are rooted, that is, as we believe more and more deeply in the love of Christ for us. That belief comes by seeing the depth of Christ's love for us revealed in his Word. So, for the next 4 weeks climaxing on Resurrection Sunday I want to direct our attention to the depth of Christ's love for us.

As I pondered the love of Christ for us and the different ways that the Bible presents it to us, I have chosen 4 ways that the depth of Christ's love is revealed. We will spend a week on each of these.

First, we know the depth of someone's love for us by what it costs that person: if they sacrifice their life for us, it assures us of deeper love than if they only sacrifice a few bruises. What our parents sacrificially gave to give us what we needed demonstrated their love for us. What a husband sacrifices for his wife and children and what a wife sacrifices for her husband and children shows love. These mirror to a lesser extent the price God the Father paid by sacrificing his Son and the depth of Christ's love by the greatness of what it cost him. As Jesus said, ¹²“**This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.** ¹³**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.** ¹⁴**You are my friends if you do what I command you.”** (John 15:12-14)

Second, we know the depth of someone's love for us by how little we deserve it. If we have treated a person well all our life and have done all that they expect of us, then when they love us, it will not prove the depth of their love as it would if they loved

us when we had offended them and shunned them and showed disdain for them and they still loved us without reservation. The more undeserving we are the more amazing and deeper is a person's love for us. So, we will see the depth of Christ's love in relation to how undeserving we are as the objects of his love. As Paul explained, "Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — ⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:5-8)

Third, we know the depth of someone's love for us by the greatness of the benefits we receive in being loved. If we are tutored to pass an exam, we will feel loved in one way. If we are helped to get a job, we will feel loved another way. If we are helped to escape from an oppressive captivity and given freedom for the rest of our life, we will feel loved another way. If we are rescued from eternal torment and given a place in the presence of God with fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore, we will know a depth of love that surpasses all others. John wrote, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." (1 John 3:1-3) So, we will see the depth of Christ's love by the greatness of the benefits we receive in being loved by him.

Fourth, we know the depth of someone's love for us by the freedom with which they love us. If a person does good things for us because someone is making them, then they are doing what they really do not want to and as a result we do not think their love is very deep. So as a rule, "Love's depth is in proportion to its liberty". So, if an insurance company pays you money because you lose your spouse, you do not marvel at

how much this company loves you, for they performed their contractual duty. If your church community makes all your meals for a month after your spouse dies and someone calls you every day and visits you every week, then you call their acts – acts of love. They are not contractually obligated as the insurance company is, they do these things out of love for you. They give love freely and willingly without expectation. We will see the depth of Christ’s love for us in his freedom. Jesus gave freely, as he said, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10:17-18)

These are ideas about a love relationship with Christ that I have observed in the New Testament. There are specific texts that stress each of those 4 ways of seeing the depth of Christ’s love for us. We will focus on 1 each week. It is my prayer that these next 4 weeks will help you grow and that you will pray with me that God will answer for us the prayer found in Paul’s writing to the church in Ephesus, ¹⁷ “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Love’s Cost

Today I want us to see the depth of Christ's love revealed in its costliness. Look with me at Ephesians 5, verses 1 and 2, and also at verses 8 to 10, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ... ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10) Let me point out 4 things of note and that enrich our lives.

First, be sure you see that Paul is showing us the depth of Christ’s love for each believer, for you and me. Verse 2 says, “[Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.](#)” The giving of himself, for each of us demonstrates his love.

Second, notice that the cost of his love was “[himself](#)”, his very life. It was not just money or time or energy or inconvenience or even suffering; it was the full extent of sacrifice – he gave himself, his life.

Third, notice that this love and this self-giving was for every believer of every age to this very day he gave himself for you. “[Christ loved us or for each of you and gave himself up for us or each of you.](#)” Paul is speaking about believers – those who have taken Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is my prayer this includes each of you.

Finally, notice that God the Father was pleased with this act of self-sacrificing love. Look at verse 2, “[as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.](#)” When God sacrificed what was most dear, His Son on the cross, it was a fragrant offering or aroma to him. God the Father loves the Son and loves the Son’s love for each believer. As believers our lives are lived as an aroma of two kinds; “[we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,](#) ¹⁶ [to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.](#)” (2 Corinthians 2:15-16) Does this help you see why the world does not like us?

Sometimes when we have known of a thing for most of lives and when it has been part of history for centuries it no longer moves us as it should. We have taken the amazing and made it common by our familiarity. So, sometimes it is good for us to step back and in the case I am going to share a story with you to take a fresh look at an act of deep love and then return to the even more amazing story of the greatest love with a fresh view. When the lesser touches our hearts and tears begin to form, we can look anew at the amazing love and let the tears flow.

My uncle Cone was let out of college at 19 to begin teaching in the small town of Estanica during the early part of World War II in order that older men could go fight in the world war against evil. He was also part of the New Mexico National Guard. It was not long afterwards that the New Mexico National Guard was called to report for duty and these men ended up fighting in the Philippines, which was controlled by the Japanese. After a brutal 3-month battle, the American soldiers were surrounded and cut off from supplies and reinforcements, so in April 1942 over 60,000 starving soldiers and about 20,000 Filipino civilians surrendered to the Japanese. The first thing the Japanese did was - anyone who had Japanese items or souvenirs in their possession were shot. Then the American officers were tortured for information. Finally, the march of over 70 miles began and became known as the Bataan Death March. The men were marched in over 105-degree high humidity heat with little to no water or food. The soldiers were half starved and dehydrated. If a man fell, they were shot or bayoneted. A few miles from the end of this long grueling march my uncle fell and 2 Navajo men quickly picked him up before he could be shot and carried him the last few miles at the risk of their own lives. They considered the cost and the risks in a matter of seconds and out of love for their fellow soldier they set aside their own risk, picked up my uncle, carried him to the end and he lived. I can only imagine the gratitude my uncle must have had. I know the deep gratitude my grandmother had when she found out how my uncle survived. Out of the approximately 80,000 men who began the Bataan Death March, just over 50,000 survived to the end and half of these would die from the brutal treatment of the Japanese by the end of the war. When my uncle was liberated at the end of the war, he weighed only about 70 lbs. Jesus said, **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”** (John 15:13) These men risked their lives for others and 2 carried my uncle and the one of the two that lived through the war and came home remained a dear friend of my uncle until their deaths. To love means one is willing to suffer and even die for the sake of another.

Jesus has loved you in this sacrificial way and even more so. Consider the life he laid down. One of the reasons that story of the Bataan Death March hits us so hard is because my uncle was only 20 years old and many of the men who died were still in their late teens to mid-twenties – they were young men. These men should have had their lives before them – marriage, career, children, but they fought evil and sacrificed their lives that others would be able to live in freedom. What did Jesus sacrifice that millions might be reconciled to God, live in the freedom of God’s love and live in eternity with God? His life.

First, Jesus was also young. He started his ministry at 30 and was crucified at 33. I would say Jesus died in his prime, just as the men on Bataan. **Second**, he was the oldest son of a widowed mother who relied upon him. One of the last things he did was make sure she was provided for. From the brutality of the cross ²⁶“Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” (John 19:26-27) Jesus gave up his life as a young man for others and made sure his mother was cared for.

Third, Jesus was kind, caring, loving, wise and courageous, which is what every parent would want their son to grow up to be. However, Jesus was also one of a kind as Peter testified Jesus “committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” (1 Peter 2:22-24)

Even Jesus’ enemies knew they could find no fault in him, so they tried to get Pilate to do their dirty work. ⁶“When the chief priests and the officers saw Jesus with Pilate, they cried out, ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.’” (John 19:6) After this

confrontation “Pilate ... took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’” (Matthew 27:24) Jesus’ life was sinless, the only sinless man to ever live. His life possessed the balance the Bible teaches and he was the only one to live it perfectly; joy and sorrow, tenderness and toughness, justice and mercy, grief and anger, speech and silence, prayer and action – his life was the most valuable life ever lived. Jesus was most worthy of living and least worthy of dying. His death brought your freedom and gave you eternal life instead of torment.

Fourth, Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is unique because he is God and man. In Jesus was united a human nature with a divine nature, this unity is a mystery that only God is capable of. Jesus’ life therefore was of infinite value and it defined the value that God gives to mankind. Jesus’ value is far above that of the human race, but mankind’s value is defined by God in Jesus as his Son. We see in Jesus that we are a reflection of the image of God as Jesus is the only visible image of God who is Spirit. Jesus as man and God went to the cross that all believers would be freed from the ravages of death and live in the presence of God forever. Jesus was a willing sacrifice, the final sacrifice, the only pure sacrifice so that believers could be reconciled back to God and live in relationship with him.

Fifth, as the Son of God, Jesus was supremely loved by his Father in heaven. Jesus took 3 disciples, Peter, James and John to the mount to pray and here God the Father performs a miracle, Jesus is transfigured and begins to glow with exceedingly bright light. This is the first miracle performed on Jesus and God speaks to the disciples saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; **listen to him.**” (Matthew 17:5) God commands that listening to his Son is critical.

Suppose that my uncle, a 20-year-old prisoner of war, was the son of the President of the United States—and he knew that there were powers available to him

because of his father. His father could arrange for him to be freed, freed not only death but also the from the prison camp, but he chose not to. Suppose that you find out that his father, the President, not only had a massive love for the boy, but also approved of his dying for the benefit of the others in prison and wanted to meet those for whom he died, and give them some of the son's inheritance because he gave his life for them. Would not the worth of that life be so unspeakably precious as to make each person feel absolutely overwhelmed with love? Does this bring what Jesus did for you into sharper focus?

Love Esteemed

Consider now not only the life that Jesus sacrificed for us, but consider also what the sacrifice involved. To get to the point where he could die, Jesus had to plan for it. He left the glory of heaven and took on human nature so that he could hunger and at times be weary and, in the end, suffer and die. The incarnation was the preparation for the nails of the cross. Jesus needed a broad human back for a place to be scourged. He needed a brow and skull as a place for the thorns. He needed cheeks for Judas' kiss and soldiers' spit. He needed hands and feet for the nails. He needed a side as a place for the spear to pierce. Jesus needed a brain and a spinal cord that felt pain, but accepted no vinegar and no gall, so that he could feel the entire excruciating death – a death freely given for you.

The two men who carried the 20-year-old boy was a wonderful picture of love. But compared to Jesus they were only a shadow of the depth of Jesus' love. Their sacrifice was costly and they experienced pain and some suffered death. Jesus' death was one of the worst kinds of torture devised for human pain. So, when we read "[Christ loved us and gave himself up for us](#)" do not just see it as history or an event of 2000 years ago. "[Gave himself up for us](#)" is the greatest sacrifice in all history and its effects

continue to this very day – Jesus paid a sacrifice and horrendous death for all believers – which includes each of us here – he died for you.

I ask in closing, how personally should each of you take this demonstration of love? Should you feel personally loved this morning and later on today and tomorrow and new week and next year? Or should it remain a kind of general, great, historic wonder that you look at from a distance with admiration, like when one stands on the rim and looks at the depths of the Grand Canyon? The answer is given by the testimony of the same writer of Ephesians, Paul, who also wrote to the believers in Galatia, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20) Jesus is the ultimate example and here Paul strives to live the life Jesus calls believers to live. Will you, as Paul and so many others have done, strive to live life by Jesus’ example and calling?

This is what the apostle and the Lord himself is calling you to this morning. To see the depths of the love of Christ for you. To believe the love that he has for you and to send the roots of your life down, down, down into the depths of this bottomless love of Jesus. How will you answer, how will you live? Let us do as Paul instructs, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.^{11:1} Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1) Amen!