

May 5, 2024

Texts: Psalm 98, John 15: 9-17

Title: "Everything You Need to Know About Love"

Our theme for today is love. Of course, when you get down to the foundation of our faith, it's all about love, God's love, but we'll give it a bit more focus today. I want to deal with 3 questions about love this morning. The first is: **where does love come from?** Now some would say that it comes from within and that we are born with it. Is that true? I'm not certain.

Little babies are the most lovable creatures in this world, but that doesn't mean that they are born full of love and a kind spirit. Don't let those innocent smiles fool you. If they were that kind and loving, they wouldn't wake you at four in the morning demanding to be fed or changed. The truth is that small babies are born totally self-centered. That doesn't mean they're bad. They're just totally helpless. In order to survive in this world they've got to make their needs known. If you meet those needs, then a baby will probably grow to love you. But, is that really love? We say that children have to be taught to hate, but isn't that true of love as well?

Think how hard it is to teach a child to share. Is it something that comes from within? Or is it something we learn as we grow up from our parents and those around us?

C.S. Lewis, the famous writer and theologian, in his study of the various Greek words for love came to distinguish between what he called "need love" and "gift love." Need love is the most common kind of love in our world. I love you

because you meet my needs. Need love is born of emptiness. It's about our need for companionship. Lewis contends that many times when we humans say to another, "I love you," what we are really meaning is, "I need you, I want you. You have a value that I very much desire to make my own, no matter what the consequence may be to you."

Now contrast "need love" with what Lewis calls "gift love." Gift love is born of fullness. The goal of gift love is to enhance the other person rather than to get something from them. "Gift love moves out to bless and to increase rather than to acquire or to diminish. Gift love is more like a bountiful, artesian well that continues to overflow as opposed to a vacuum or a black hole." Lewis concludes that's what God's love is all about. In other words, God's love is gift love, not need love. This, of course, is the meaning of *agape* love.

Are we capable of *agape* love--that is, loving as God loves? To a certain extent we are, but it doesn't come naturally. To grow in gift love, we have to go to the source of love which is God. Jesus says in our lesson for today, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you . . ." Where does true love come from? It comes from God.

**"What does love look like?" is the second question.** "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 . . ." And "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." What does love look like?

It like the story of a young man who fell in love with a young woman. The young man went to serve in the military for a year. They agreed to get married when he came back. In the meanwhile, the young woman was involved in a serious auto accident in which she suffered a brain injury. The part of her brain that controlled her facial muscles was damaged. Her once lovely face was now disfigured. She decided to release her fiancé from their promise. She knew he wouldn't want her anymore after seeing photos of her face.

But upon his return he would hear nothing of this as she was the same person he fell in love with on the inside where it counts. "When I saw your photos, I realized that nothing has changed. You're still the person I fell in love with. You're still as beautiful as ever. Because I love you!"

Beautiful story, isn't it? Where does love come from? It comes from God. We cannot make ourselves ugly enough that God won't love us. What does love look like? It looks like a man nailed to a cross, not because of anything we can do for him, but simply because he loves us so much. Love comes from God. It looks like self-sacrifice as in Jesus' sacrifice for us. And the final question: **What does such love require from us?**

Jesus answers that question: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." We are to love others as he has loved us--not with need love, but with gift love. Not because of anything they can do for us, but because of what Christ has done for us. The world says "Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Christ

says to do good for people who are incapable of doing anything for you in return.

Where does love come from? It comes from God alone. What does it look like? It looks like a man hanging on a cross in our behalf. What does such love require out of us? It requires us to move beyond need love to gift love. To look around at others who may be in need of God's love and to give it to them--not asking what they can do for us, but remembering what Christ has done for us.

“This is my command,” Jesus said to his disciples, and also to us: “Love each other.”