

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Christ Jesus, our Good Shepherd and Resurrected Lord. The title for today’s sermon is “What is Love?”, based on the Epistle reading from 1st John chapter 3. Let us pray.... Amen.

What is love? Many people, from psychologists to philosophers to song writers to parents to young teens, have tried to explain this question: what is love?

In 1993, a song titled; ‘What is love?’ and was well received around the world. While the song sold millions, its lyrics were about as deep as a puddle. As such, the song didn’t answer the question: “What is love?”, instead it simply posed the question over, and over, and over.

So, on a more serious note, in our current North American culture, part of the problem is the word ‘love’ is defined in many different ways, and sometime even in contradictory ways. It’s morphing into something rather different. In a span of only seconds I can profess my deep feelings for my wife and our family by telling them I love them, and then in the same breath turn and say I love a funny commercial or a certain brand of toilet paper. But using the word love in this way kind of flushes the meaning of it. In our world love, and what it is, is discussed in many books, movies, internet pages, radio and t.v. programs, and in people’s regular lives.

But, what is love? I mean, what is it really?

Some people will say love is a powerful feeling, some might even say the most important feeling. That definition can in some parts be true, but it is far from complete.

I’ve heard love described as the burning one feels deep inside their chest when they see the one they want to spend the rest of their life with, or at least the rest of the night. It sounds crude, but the latter is the more common in our adulterous world. The world, with the devil, love to have people chase after the feeling of love because too often the feeling searched for is lust and not love. For lust burns hot but it also dies fast. That same warm feeling can be manipulated with a good meal or warm drink.

The problem with focusing on love as only a powerful feeling is it, unfortunately, also doesn’t stay the same and feelings can be manipulated.

So, if love is not just an emotion, then “what is love?”

To really understand love, and what love is, we have to look outside of ourselves and to something, or Someone, more stable and trustworthy than our fleeting and sometimes manipulated emotions. Now, don’t get me wrong, emotions are very good and important, but they need to be tempered by God’s Word of Scripture to us from straying.

Fortunately God defines “What love is”, He also demonstrated it by His Son Christ Jesus. In Christ, love is demonstrated to be much different than how the world likes to see it. In Christ love is not a feeling but an action. “... **God shows his love for us in that while we were still**

sinner, Christ died for us.”(Romans 5:8) He did that because **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**(John 3:16)

The ultimate expression of love is not a feeling; the ultimate expression of love is an action, namely to die for the one you say you love. As we have heard Jesus say; **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”**(John 15:13) That is exactly what Jesus did for you, for me, and for all people.

We are called to do the same for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and for our neighbours. We are called to die for them. John tells us in today’s epistle: **“we ought to lay down our lives for them.”**(1 John 3:16) But John is not just talking about physically dying, death is often the easy part. John knew this well as he lived a long life, but one where he did face many hardships and sufferings. It is easy to get one’s head chopped off for the faith, it is much harder to live in a neighbourhood, attend a school, or work in an environment where everyone else seems mock you and who take pot shots at you because of your faith. Laying down your physical life is easier than risking your job or livelihood, your friends or the respect of others because you are a Christian. Yet take a look at Jesus, at what He says, and what He willing did out of love for you, me, and all people. When troubles came for Him, He didn’t attack and hope to be killed quickly by one of the soldiers, instead He willing took our abuse, our insults, the beatings we deserve, our shame, and our humiliation. Death, in and of itself is the easy part, the hard part is everything else which leads up to death. Yet even through it all, Christ Jesus promises to be with us to carry us in Himself each step of the way.

Christ’s death for you is because He loves you, really and for eternity. Jesus actions to save us sinners demonstrates what love really is. While we were still sinner, while we were enemies of God and Christ Jesus, while we were rejecting the Saviour of the world, God loved us so much He sent His only Son into our world to take on our flesh and blood, to take on our sins and shortcomings, and to pay for all of our rebellion and treason against God. Jesus, the Word of Life, paid for our sins and shortcomings with His own perfect and innocent life. Jesus was not content with watching us condemn ourselves with our sins and sinful actions so in His love for you, He did something very active about it.

This is why Jesus came into our world, He came for you, and yes I mean each of you. For Paul wrote: **“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”**(1 Timothy 1:15)

The reason Jesus came is because we are sinners, each and everyone of us. We **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”**(Romans 3:23) We do not love God as we should. We do not love our neighbours as we should. We are sinners who desperately need Christ: His Word, His forgiveness, His deliverance, His salvation for we cannot do it ourself. So Repent, and believe the Gospel.

In spite of our shortcoming God still loves you, He just doesn't like your sins. God demonstrated just how much He loves you and how far He was willing to go to save you by Christ Jesus and how He laid His life down for you, for me, and for all people.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus explains to His disciples who He is and why He came. He is the Good Shepherd, we are not. We are the sheep, the ones who stray, who easily get scattered, the ones who are more interested in our wants than in the needs of others. We are sheep, and if you know sheep, this is not a compliment to us; instead it is a remarkably accurate comparison.

Still Christ came for you. Jesus did not just come and find those who have their life in order. But Jesus didn't travel around Galilee and Judah looking for the right kind of people, rather most often He went looking for the 'wrong kind of people. Jesus went to the hated, the traitorous tax collectors, Jesus went to the most despised and alienated people of His day, including those with contagious and life threatening diseases, to prostitutes, thieves, liars, those possessed by demons, to the dead, and to a variety of other of what we too might consider too far gone, like the religious leaders. But, Jesus not only went to them, He walked with them, talked with them, touched them, healed them, and even ate with them to the confusion of those in higher society.

Then Christ demonstrated the greatest love, as He explained to His disciples: “**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**”(John 15:13) Yet Jesus didn't just lay His life down for His friends, Jesus laid His life down and died to save all people. Then on third day Jesus rose from the dead proclaiming His victory, our sins paid for, and our salvation in Him.

In Christ your sins are truly and completely forgiven. In Christ you have the gift of eternal life.

Looking at today's Epistle reading from 1st John chapter 3 we see and hear Christ's good news. John points to what love is and what we have the privilege to share. We have the answer to the question: “what is love?” “**In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**”(1 John 4:10-11) John tells us how “**we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ For if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?**”(1 John 3:16-17)

Now it is very important to note, you and I cannot in anyway contribute to our salvation: Christ did it all for you. There are things you can do to lose your salvation, but as Scripture reveals, Christ's death on the cross and His physical resurrection on the third day did everything needed to reconcile you back to God, to pay for your sins, and to earn eternal life. You freely receive gift of Christ's salvation for you through Holy Baptism. “**For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**”(Galatians 3:27) In Baptism “**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)

God’s command, written by John, to lay our lives down for our brothers and sisters in Christ is not a Law demand by which we are saved, rather it is the fruit of the Gospel. Since our salvation is secure in Christ and there is nothing left for us to do for our salvation, we have the freedom to share Christ’s love and His gifts with the world around us. “*God* daily and richly provides *us* with all that *we* need to support *our* body and life”(SC, 1st Article) Everything we have in this earthly life is a gift from God, and He abundantly pours out these earthly blessing on us. He calls us to share these blessings with those around us who need it for His glory and the extension of His kingdom. We have the freedom and privilege to love those around us, not just a feeling, but actions where something actually done. This love is prompted and proceeds from the truth and is carried out in actual deeds done for the blessing of another. Whatever tends to our brother’s, or sister’s, salvation is done ‘in truth’. This kind of love flows from genuine saving faith, the kind which is a gift of God on account of Christ.

Our Good Shepherd has come for has come for you. Through the hearing of His Word and reception of His Sacraments the Holy Spirit works to strengthen this gift of faith in you. Here is What Love is: how God reminds you of what He has done and what He continues to do for you. Rejoice in your Saviour Christ Jesus and how much He loves you and all He has done for you. Rejoice in Jesus death for you and His resurrection for your salvation. Jesus has done everything for your salvation, so rejoice as He works through you to share His salvation with those around you.

Amen.

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