

Love

NT 1st Corinthians 13:4-8 ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

Pray

Our message today is about Love. We lit the 4th candle of advent last Sunday which was the candle of Love. Today we celebrate Love as Christmas Day is when God's love came to earth in the form of a tiny human baby, and although he was a human baby born of a human mother he was the son of God and was fully human and fully divine. When we speak of the trinity we speak of one essence in 3 divine persons- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Today it's all about God the Son, also known as Jesus. God the father sent us Jesus out of his love for us, and Jesus confirmed the most important commandments in that he said we were to Love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus spent his ministry showing what he meant by this by showing love through healing and saving people and showing kindness to people from all walks of life. Did it seem like

he spoke harshly to the Pharisees and the religious leaders? Yes he did, but again it was in love to try and get them to understand that God wanted a true loving relationship, not a legalistic one.

The Bible tells us that God's will is for us to love other people with a godly love. Not only are we called to "love your neighbor as yourself, but in Luke 6:27-28 Jesus tells us "***But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*** As nice as the thoughts and feelings around love are, this is something that we as humans struggle with. And the people in the Bible struggled with this too. When Jesus said that we are to love your neighbor as yourself, the question was promptly asked 'Who is my neighbor', and chances are that question was being asked so they knew who they could exclude from having to love. But there were no exclusions to the answer to who is my neighbor and there are still no exclusions today. My neighbor is Everyone. So it's understandable that people struggle with this. And the struggle to love everyone is even made more difficult when it is added that we should love our enemy. What??"

Well I am hoping that most of us don't have enemies, but let's talk about love verses liking someone. I am a practical person so my first thought goes to, well do I have to like someone in order to love someone? We all know some people that are not very likable, and if we're being honest there may be some people that might find us unlikable. As a Christian, we're commanded to love everyone, but do we have to like and get along with everyone? There is a lot of pressure on Christians to get along with everyone. Not only are we to love others, but Jesus even says that God's children are called to be peacemakers. Our standard, therefore, not only becomes loving everyone but also helping others get along with each other.

I found this task very hard through the years and it's something I actively work on and pray about. First let me state that there is a difference between the command to love everyone,

and getting along with or liking everyone. The command to love everyone is concrete. Love is an action, where I can show love to someone no matter what my relationship with that person is. Love is the power of being seen, valued, LOVED. There are many types of love also. There is romantic love and brotherly or sisterly love, but we are called to show Agape love, which is a sacrificial kind of love that God extends to everyone.

When Jesus commanded us to love everyone, and he was asked who is my neighbor, he told the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan picked the man up and found help for him, but he left once he knew the man was in good hands. Loving his neighbor didn't include trying to make this man his best friend. Loving your neighbor doesn't necessarily mean being personally close to everyone you come across. But it does mean treating everyone with respect, generosity and love appropriate to the different kinds of relationships you find yourself in.

So what if you find yourself not liking someone? You may not like someone but that's no excuse for being cruel or rude, gossiping about people, or being present when others are being mean or rude and doing or saying nothing. And if you find yourself in a position to help that person that you don't like, loving your neighbor requires that you do just that! That may even mean standing up for them against teasing or being polite when your peers are being rude. So while you don't have to 'like' everybody, you don't have to treat everyone as your best friend. But you do have to love them.

And I would say this also, because it's hard as a Christian to think about the fact that you may not like someone when you are commanded to do something even bigger which is to love someone. But when you find yourself not liking someone, ask God for help about it and from a purely social standpoint try to get to know them and find out about them. I can tell you from my

life experience three things. First, when I join a new group, class, job, etc, there are those people I immediately bond with and those that I don't feel I have anything in common with. It's the people that I immediately bond with I think are going to have my back and be there for me. But you know what, looking in the rear view mirror it is almost always those people that I didn't want to give the time of day to at first who became by truest friends and support group. And the second thing is, you'd be surprised if you spent time with someone you feel you don't like and you actually do feel like afterwards you do feel like for them. It may not happen after one meeting and it may take a very active effort on your part. I've lived long enough to have these experiences. The thing is, when you pray about these things, God won't necessarily change the other person to be more likeable, but he will change you to help you accept that other person more. And third, You can genuinely love someone while not liking what they say and do, and not liking the kind of person that they are. You're not required to hang out with everyone and to become their BFF, but you are required to genuinely love them.

Jesus is known for hanging out with the sinners and with those whom society had rejected. But this doesn't mean that he participated in their sin, or that he approved of the way they lived their lives. Once again, loving someone does not mean that you will like every person or even respect them beyond the point of recognizing that they are made in God's image. God has given us minds to discern, to some extent, the hearts of others. We also are made in God's image and should not unnecessarily put ourselves in harm's way by trusting someone who is not worthy of that trust. Remember, Jesus slipped away from crowds because He knew their hearts and needed to protect Himself

Even so, when we begin to love someone with God's love, our attitude toward that person changes. When we begin to show love by our actions, our attitudes will follow. Love will still be a choice, but it will gradually become one your heart is more willing and ready to make.

When we look at Jesus' interactions with others, we see that He willingly related with all kinds—sinners, tax collectors, Pharisees, Sadducees, Romans, Samaritans, fisherman, women, children—with no regard for society's view of the respectable. Jesus loved these people and treated them out of that love, but it did not always look pleasant. He spoke harsh words to those who opposed Him, but He did so because it was best for them. He sacrificed His time, His emotional energy, and His wisdom for those who hated Him because He knew it would either bring them to a saving knowledge of Him or turn them away forever. Either way, they benefitted from His input.

So how do we show Christian love? Here are a few of the many passages that teach us how to show Christian love.

1. Care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25). ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.
2. Serve one another (Galatians 5:13). ¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh^[a]; rather, serve one another humbly in love.
3. Bear with and forgive complaints against others (Colossians 3:13). ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

4. Encourage and esteem one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11). ¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing

Love is the driving force behind everything the follower of Christ does. In 1st Corinthians 13:1-3 The Apostle Paul wrote about the importance of Love ***13 If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,^[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.*** It's all about love. Walking with God produces fruit in our lives, and the foremost of which, is love. It also produces joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These things are known as the fruit of the Spirit. They become a part of who we are, and they should be evident in all that we do.

Merry Christmas!