

## **Sermon Notes – October 25, 2020**

*“Just Say It, Mean It, and Show It!”*

Matthew 22:34-40

Many of you remember the late great actor Christopher Reeves. He had health, wealth, good looks; he was handsome; physically fit; one of the best looking men in Hollywood at the time, he was married and had family; he had everything that life had to offer. But then all of a sudden, he had an accident, fell off a horse, and was left as a quadriplegic. When he woke up in the hospital, he said that he wanted to just let go and die – but there was something that changed his mind. His wife, Dana, walked in and she looked at him and very sternly (but firmly and gently) said, “I want you to listen to this because I am only going to say it once -- I will support you whatever you decide because this is your life and your decision. But I want you to know this -- I’m in it for the long-haul, and you’re still you, and I love you.” Christopher Reeves said that her words gave him the strength to carry on. (For many years we know that he lived his life as a quadriplegic, trying to raise money for research to be done to help people who had head and neck injuries.)

All of us sometimes depend on a spouse, a friend, a sibling, etc. to give us the strength to carry on. **But the greatest friend that we will have and at some point in our lives, we will find out that God is the only one that is there for us ALL the time, EVERY time.** He will give us the strength to carry on in life because God created us to be in relationship with Him, one another, and to know love.

In our gospel lesson today an expert in the law wanted to test Jesus and see how well Jesus understood the Jewish law. So he asked Jesus, “Of all the 613 commandments which one is the greatest?” Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” Then he quoted from Leviticus 19:18: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The Jews understood loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind -- they had to recite that verse twice a day as Jewish men. They had to teach their children and their children’s children that same scripture verse and what it meant. But Jesus added to it -- “Love

your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus knew that the Pharisees only understood loving your neighbor as being another Jew. But that’s not what Jesus is saying – he said “Love your neighbor as yourself” and Jesus’ definition of neighbor is broader than Jews. You see the Jews told people who they could love and who they couldn’t love. They were told to love other Jews -- people just like them. They were told NOT to love the Gentiles, or the Samaritans, or women, or children, or slaves, or tax collectors, or prostitutes, or sinners. They did not have to have any affection or care for them – and Jesus knew that. He said, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

I want you to think a minute about loving God. These two are on equal footing. If you love God, you’re going to love your neighbor – and if you’re loving your neighbor, then you’re loving God. But, how do we love God with our heart, mind, soul, and strength? ... I think there are several ways: **One of those is that we love God and reverence his name.** We respect the things of God; we observe the Sabbath; and we spend time with God getting to know Him. How do you get to know him? ... through prayer, worship, Bible study, and reading the Bible; through fellowship with other Christians. You spend time getting to know Him.

Have you ever noticed that when you fall in love with somebody that you want to spend time with them? It doesn’t matter how much time, how short that time is, or how long that time is. You can be a girl who loves shopping and the guy doesn’t care anything about shopping, but he will go with you because he loves you. You may be with a guy who likes fishing and you don’t, but you’ll go with him because you love him. You spend time with that person. *God wants us to spend time getting to know Him and that’s one of the ways that we show we love Him.*

***The best way, Jesus is saying in this scripture, is you love your neighbor as yourself.*** What did Jesus mean by that? Matthew Hare, a seminary professor and a New Testament scholar wrote a commentary on Matthew’s gospel. In his commentary, he said these words, “In the modern day world we abuse the word “love” because we always associate it with feelings of affection. The primary component of Biblical love is

not feelings of affection.” You don’t have feelings of affection for your enemy, do you? He said, “The primary component of Biblical love is commitment.” It is a decision, an act of will, where you choose to care about somebody’s needs sacrificially without what’s in it for you in return. It’s a commitment to God; it’s choosing to do the right thing because of God’s love for you and your love for God. As you grow in that relationship with God, you grow in loving your neighbor as yourself.

**How do we love our neighbor?** We have to first see them as a creation of God – created in His image, just like us - and then we have to depend on the power of God’s Spirit to help us. Loving our neighbor, loving our enemy, or someone who annoys and irritates us is NOT something that comes natural for us – it can only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit. It can only be done through practice. Sometimes we’re going to fail at it and we will have to try again and again. Thank goodness God is patient and loving with us.

I want to share some examples with you of loving your neighbor:

Dr. Carl Howie is a Presbyterian Minister and a book author. In one of his books, he tells a story about how he and his wife went to New York City to see a Broadway play. They got out of the play late at night and they caught the subway to get back to their car. He said that it was late at night and it was cold and bitter outside in New York City. There were very few people on the subway. There was a homeless woman who got on the subway right after they did. She wore torn clothing; her hair was disheveled; she had on gloves that were so holy that he wouldn’t even call them gloves because he couldn’t see how they could warm her hands. He didn’t know if she was extremely tired or drunk, but she fell asleep on the subway. The lady sat with her hands in her lap and fell asleep. No matter how many stops they made, she stayed asleep. All of a sudden, he noticed a little Puerto-Rican boy. He and his mother were on the train and they started walking towards one of the exit doors to get off. The mother got off but the little boy stayed on. He walked right in front of that homeless woman and he stopped in front of her. He stared at her for a moment, took off his gloves, placed them on her lap without waking

her up, and got off the train with his mother. Dr. Howie said, "That's what I call love of neighbor." The little boy was moved by compassion. He saw somebody in need and even though it was a cold night and his own hands would be cold, he pulled his own gloves off and shared them with her - because he took her need seriously. That's what God wants us to do - see our neighbor's need and help however we can.

I heard an interesting story - and I don't know how many of us would be strong enough to live like this - but I call it, "Love of God that causes you to love your neighbor." During World War II, there's a story about a family from Switzerland who moved to the United States. They became naturalized citizens and moved here in the 1920s. There was a Japanese family who also came over about that time, but never got naturalized as citizens of the United States. They lived side-by-side. They both raised roses and various flowers and sold them at the open markets in San Francisco. During World War II when Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan, all the Japanese residents in the United States that were not natural citizens were gathered by the soldiers and put into an internment camp in Colorado. They stayed there with their kids - some of them for a year, 3 years, 4 years. The particular family was rounded up by the American soldiers and taken to one of those camps in Colorado. The Swiss family in California told them that they would watch after their house, greenhouse, and roses. "We will take care of things until you come back." Well they were gone a year... 2 years... 3 years... almost 4 years before they were released from that camp and put on a train to come back home to California. When they got to California, the husband, wife, and two kids had no idea if they'd have a home, a garden, flowers, a greenhouse, a nursery, or anything. But when they got there, guess what they found? ... The house looked good; the yard had been mowed; the nursery and the greenhouse were still intact and everything looked nice. They walked into the house and found a bud vase of roses on the table. They also found a check written out to them for all the roses that had been sold over the years by this Swiss family who cared for the farm in their absence. It was a check for that amount. The Japanese family could not believe that somebody would care that much to take care of their house, their farm, their roses while they were gone - and even take the money

and put it in the bank for them rather than themselves -- ***that is called loving God so much that you love your neighbor as yourself.***

Nancy Duff, who is a Princeton Seminary Professor, said, “We still want to think that love is an affection for one another, but we have a hard time feeling that for anybody that is our enemy or annoys us or hurts us in any way.” She, just like Professor Matthew Hare said, “We can deliberately choose to care for somebody’s needs, sacrificing our time and energy, without thinking of what is in return for us -- with the help of God - and especially when our hearts and our lives are filled with the love of God.” You see it’s only when we feel loved by God and we love God that we can share with others love for neighbor. ***When we love God, we’re propelled and compelled to love our neighbor and when we love our neighbor, it’s one of the best ways to show our love for God.***

Pastor Jimmy Brown, when he was a little kid, said, “I had a terrible crush on a little girl in the first grade. She had the most beautiful blond hair, blue eyes; wore her hair in pigtails; wore beautiful dresses every day; and she could swing higher than any kid in the first grade. I had a terrible crush on her.” One day in class she passed him a note that said, “Jimmy do you love me?” He answered with a “yes.” The next day she sent him a note that said, “Jimmy do you really mean it? A lot of people say they love you but they don’t mean it! Do you really mean it?” He said, “Yes, I love you and I mean it.” The next day he got another note from her in class that said, “Jimmy if you really loved me, you’d show me.” He said, “Show you? Didn’t I give you my best G.I. Joe eraser and pencil? Didn’t I keep Tommy and Billy from pulling your pig-tails? What do you want me to do?” She said, “Show me, Jimmy. Sit with me at lunch time. Hold my hand when we’re together. Play with me at recess. Just be with me, Jimmy. Show me.”

***I wonder if sometimes God doesn’t say to us, “Don’t just say that you love me and you love your neighbor. Mean it and show it by the way that you live your life.”*** We can’t do it on our own. It takes the power of God and His love for us to love our neighbor as we should.

Who is our neighbor, you say? Is it like the Jews thought – it's just the people like us? ... No. Remember the story of the Good Samaritan when Jesus said that the Jewish priest and the Rabbi passed by the man in the gutter who had been beaten and left for dead and robbed? Jesus said that it was a Samaritan who came and helped the injured man. Here was a Jewish man in the ditch, beaten and robbed and lying there to die. The Samaritan passes by, feels compassion, goes over, and takes care of his needs. He bounds up his wounds. He puts him on his donkey, takes him to the innkeeper, and says, "If you'll take care of him until I get back, I'll pay you what I owe you." Jesus asked the lawyer that day, "Who do you think is the neighbor?" You remember that Jews hated the Samaritans so much that he couldn't even say "the Samaritan." He said, "the man that showed him mercy." We still have trouble with our prejudice, don't we?

Who is your neighbor? ... Anybody in need – no matter what their race, nationality, rich or poor, young or old, Hispanic, Japanese, Chinese -- no matter who they are. They are our neighbor. Sometimes it's a stranger and sometimes it's even our enemy. Do we feel love and affection for them? ... Not affection... **but are we willing to make a commitment to taking care of the needs of others – and meet those needs even if it takes a sacrifice to ourselves in our time, energy, or money – without thinking about "what's in it for me?"** God calls us to love our neighbor and to love Him. How do we love Him? ... by loving one another. Love is the greatest thing that keeps us going. You know if you take a hinge, put it on a door, hook it to the doorframe, it allows that door to open and close. Guess what the connection between us and God is? ... Love. That's the hinge. What's the connection between us and one another? ... Love. And God has called us to love Him and to love one another.

You want to love God, then love one another and if you love one another, you are loving Him. I want to challenge us to spend time getting to know God. I want to challenge us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Will we treat others with the kindness and consideration that we treat ourselves? May God help us. Today, I ask you, "Do we do more than say it? Do we mean it? Will we show it?"