

Sermon Notes - April 25, 2021

“Love for One Another - Our Witness to the World”

(I John 3:11-18)

There was a young kid, a high school student, who asked his Dad, a Seminary Professor, “Dad, what do you think the hardest thing was that God had to do?” He said, “Son, I don’t think they ever taught us that in seminary. What do you think the toughest thing is that God had to do?” He said, “Well, in Science, I thought maybe it was creation - when God created the world. Then I thought about all the miracles that Jesus did and I thought maybe that was hard. Then I thought about his resurrection and how he raised Jesus from the dead. But, you know, I think the toughest thing that God had to do was to teach us to understand who he is and how much he loves us.” Have you ever thought about it? The toughest thing that God had to do was to teach us human beings to understand who he is and how much he loves us. Now, we understand who he is through the law and the prophets - through the scriptures. We also understand God through Jesus, who came as a human being and died for our sins. But, do we know how much he loves us and is it real in our lives?

In I John, the author says, “This is how you know what love is: That Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay our lives down for our brothers and sisters.” The late, great church father, Tertullian, once said about the early church, “The one thing that made Christians different from unbelievers was their treatment of one another. It was their care for the helpless and their practice of loving kindness that branded them in the eyes of their opponents.” They would often say about those Christians, “Look at how they love each other. Look how they treat one another. Look how they’re willing to die for one another.” Now, did Jesus call you and I to die physically? ... Probably not. We may have to, but most of us won’t. But, we do give our lives in other ways to people. And what John is talking about here is that we are to love one another in the family of God (our brothers and sisters) and to care about those in need. He says that love is not, in essence, mushy and gushy and emotional - it’s not about just words. We are called to not just “talk-the-

talk,” but to “walk-the-walk.” *We are to love one another practically and with our actions. The best witness we as Christians have is loving one another.* Jesus, in John 13:34-35 said, “By this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.” *Sometimes that love will be costly, won’t it?* Sometimes it will require some sacrifices on my part and yours.

I heard an interesting story about a guy named Jeffrey Collins, who served as an Executive Director of a Ministry called “Love and Action”. It is a group that ministers to the needs of AIDS patients and their families. Jeffrey had worked all week, put in 60 hours that week, and by Friday afternoon at 5:00, he was tired and looking forward to going home to have a few hours of quietness – no phone calls, no disturbances, no people to see. But, at 5:00, he was the only one at the office and guess what? ... The phone rang. Now, he was tempted to not answer it, just like most of us and he got a little angry, “Why are they calling at 5:00? It’s time to go home!” But, he went ahead and answered the phone. It was one of their AIDS patients, Jimmy. Jimmy was very sick and he was scared. He had fever and chills; he couldn’t keep anything on his stomach and he was all by himself. Jimmy said, “Jeffrey, could you please come to my house? I need some medicine. I need help. Could you please come by?”

Can’t you see Jeffrey saying, “Lord, please not today. I just want to go home. I’ve already put in my sixty hours.” But, he went to see Jimmy. When he got there, Jimmy was laying on the sofa. He had regurgitated all over himself and the floor; he had fever and chills; he was as pale as a piece of cotton. Jeffrey said, “I went to the bathroom, got him a wet cloth, and put it on his head. I went and got him some clean clothes out of his bedroom so he could change his dirty, soiled clothes. I took his dirty clothes and put them in the washer. Then, I went and got a towel and tried to clean up the mess on the floor and the sofa. While I was cleaning the floor, I was angry and praying, ‘Lord, I can’t believe I’m up here doing this.’” Can’t you imagine that talk in his head? “Lord, how did I get stuck with this? I wanted to go home.” About that time, a knock came on the door, and it was a friend of Jimmy’s named Russ. Russ came

in the door to find out how Jimmy was doing and he saw Jeffrey cleaning the floor. He looked over at Jimmy and said, "Jimmy, I understand now." He said, "What do you understand?" He said, "I know who Jesus is now. He's like Jeffrey." That night, Jeffrey got to talk to Russ about Jesus, and that night, Russ committed his life to Jesus Christ. ***Sometimes love is costly. Sometimes it requires a sacrifice on our part.*** Maybe it won't be giving our physical life away and dying, but it may require something we don't want to do. I want you to notice that God worked in spite of Jeffrey's anger and disappointment and another person came to Jesus. God has a way of working in us - in spite of ourselves.

Mother Teresa, one time said, "The significance in our ministry is not are we growing in doing more, but are we growing in love in our actions. Are we growing in the love of God in what we do for others?" God is asking us to give away our lives - to lay down our lives. *Sometimes we lay down our lives in giving of our time, our talents, our resources, using our skills, using our precious commodity of time. Maybe it is our finances. But, he's saying that we will share it and when we give of it, God multiplies it, magnifies it, and brings glory to him. He says, "Love is practical. Love will be shown in your actions. Don't just talk about it - do it! And do it for the glory of God."*

Dr. John Killinger died several years ago. He was a book author and a Pastor. In one of his sermons, he talked about "little deeds" and "little actions". He said, "I believe that one day, when we die and get to heaven, and we stand in the presence of God, He won't ask what are all the great achievements and accomplishments of our lives," (for example, the first woman Senator in the state or the bank President, or "Teacher of the Year" or you wrote ten books). "He's not going to ask that. I think God will look at all those inconsequential small things that you've done for others that many of us have long forgotten" - for example, mowing the grass for your neighbor when they're sick; maybe tutoring a kid at school that you don't want to help, but you know you can help them because they're struggling -- maybe it's the time you cooked a meal and cleaned the house for a mom and dad who had just lost their child to death; maybe it's when you gave somebody a ride to church or to the doctor. He

said, “It’s going to be all those inconsequential things that God is going to look at that you’ve done for others and you did it with love.” And love is not this gushy, warm feeling – ***it’s choosing to do the right thing and doing it because of the compassion and care that Christ has given us.***

The best witness we have is our love for one another – not just the people in the church, in our family, but our neighbors and strangers. Have you ever noticed that sometimes it’s easiest to do something nice for a stranger? We can do something nice for them and we don’t mind. We’re probably not going to see them again. But, guess who’s harder to love sometimes? ... People in your family that get under your skin or the neighbor across the street who borrows from you five times a week or five times a day or calls you ten times a day. Sometimes they are the hardest to love and care for, aren’t they?

But, God calls us to love everyone – even sometimes outside of our comfort zone – even sometimes the people that may misuse us. “Wait a minute, Miss Peggy. Don’t we define love by our own assessment? I’m going to help this person if I think they are telling me the truth. I’ll love and help this person if they can appreciate what I am giving them. I will love and appreciate this person if they meet my approval test and I think they are going to do something with what I gave them, the right way.” *Do we give to the poor in love or in judgment?*

I want you to think about something about Jesus. In the parable of the ten lepers, Jesus healed ten people with leprosy and only one came back to give thanks. Just for thought -- was it because the other nine had mixed motives and intentions? They wanted to be healed, but they didn’t want to serve God and live for him. I wonder how many people took advantage of Jesus because they wanted to be healed – and he healed them - but they had the wrong motives? How many times do you and I give to people – and sometimes they misuse it? ***Jesus loves us unconditionally and no strings attached. I love you. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for us and he calls us to lay down our lives (not necessarily physically, but with our time and our talents, and our skills).*** Sometimes God asks us to do it even when we don’t want to and

it's going to be costly and it's going to be sacrificial. But, what John is saying is, "The best witness we as Christians have to the world is our love for one another."

Today, I want to ask us a question: How well are we doing at loving one another, not just in the church, not just in our biological families, but even the strangers and the neighbors out there?

Any of you remember that many, many years ago there was there was a program called, "Candid Camera" on TV? Do you remember that sometimes they would get an actor or actress to go up to someone on the street that was standing by themselves and give them their kid? They'd say something like, "Would you watch my kid for just a second? I'll be right back. I'm going in the store." They'd be gone for twenty minutes or so and the person left is looking around waiting for them to come back. They would get pictures and scenarios of people just to see what they would do when they were by themselves. Maybe they gave somebody a bag of money and then just walked away. They wanted to see what they'd do with it when alone. Do they take it home or what do they do? They filmed these people on "Candid Camera."

I want to ask you a question, for myself and for you today: If we were on God's "Candid Camera"- nobody's looking, but God - would he find us smiling and being Jesus to the stranger outside, but also to our neighbor or family close by? And would he find us being willing to sacrifice and make a difference in the world?

God's love is practical. God's love exemplifies itself in action. Our love for one another is our best witness to the world. Love, God's love, is sacrificial and giving. When we give it away, he multiplies and magnifies it and brings glory to him. His love is patient. Thank goodness he works in and through us, in spite of our attitude. May God help us to grow in loving one another. Amen.