

“Why Love?”

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1 John 4:7-21, Luke 6:27-36

Love! What could be more central to the community of Jesus Christ than love? It's a worthy topic for another sermon for sure!

But I have to confess something to you this morning. When growing up, I did a bad thing with my brother and cousin. We devised a plan that I am ashamed of. We played in an unsettling way with the fact that cats are natural predators of birds.

I lived on what used to be a very large dairy farm of hundreds of acres. We never ran it as a commercial farm, but there was still a big dairy barn on the property and we raised animals in there, most often pigs and cows. We also had two barn cats, Tiger and Fluffer.

To understand the story, you have to know a bit about the barn. On the ground level where the animals would stay, we had lots of barn swallows that built these mud nest on the ceiling beams that supported the hay loft above. Each end of the barn had big

sliding doors and often we would have them open and the barn swallows would fly back and forth through the barn. In the middle of the barn on one side was a milk room that used to house a big vat for milk. We didn't milk cows, so we used it to store grain for our animals. That room had a door going outside to the driveway and then another door going into the main part of the barn.

One time, we saw Fluffer eyeing a swallow flying through the barn and launched herself into the air from the ground to catch it mid-flight near the ceiling. We thought that was pretty amazing! And it gave us an idea.

So, we positioned one person at the outside milk room door and another at the inside milk room door. We left both of the doors open while the other person started running through the barn to corral the swallows. We got a mess of them to fly into the milk room at which point we slammed shut both the doors trapping perhaps ten or more birds in that little milk room.

Then, we slipped in Fluffer and Tiger and waited as we heard some rustling in the closed room. We knew what was going on. Looking back, I realize how cruel this was and I feel awful about it.

A while later we opened up the doors to find no birds, but two very fat cats sitting on the bags of grain amid not a few feathers!

A natural predator and its prey don't exactly have a loving relationship, except that perhaps the predator loves the meal that the prey becomes.

What is love?

Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts wrote about this idea of love for all people, including those we might try to avoid who are considered enemies.

READ LUKE 6:27-36

This is a tall order, especially for the families and friends of those who have lost loved ones in the two mass shootings yesterday and early this morning in El Paso Texas and Dayton, Ohio.

How can we possibly love not only our neighbors, but those who have done us harm?

And yet ... this is what God calls us to. In fact, love is the one thing that can create the balance our world needs.

It is easy to **say** love is unconditional regard for another.

But we need examples to really understand the depth of love.

Love is what has a woman plant fruit trees in her yard not only for her own enjoyment, but because she knows that the trees will be living and producing fruit 50 to 75 years from now and that many people she will never know will be able to enjoy the fruit.

Love is when a man continues to visit and care for his wife who has dementia and doesn't remember who he is, often yelling at him and at times fears him.

Love is what has a single mother work at a fast food restaurant where she deals with the stress and grief of a revolving and sometimes incompetent staff each day, just so that she can provide for her children.

Love is what had Davey Blackburn forgive two men who beat, shot, and killed his pregnant wife Amanda while their baby slept in a nearby room in 2015. Davey understood that the path of love and forgiveness is not easy. He shared with Fox News at the time,

I don't want to live my life going down the path of bitterness because it will destroy my soul and it will destroy everybody around me. So today, I choose

forgiveness. And tomorrow, I pray that I can wake up and choose forgiveness by the power of Jesus Christ. One of the things about Jesus when they were inflicting way more pain than any of us can imagine on him, on the cross, he looked out and he said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." And so that Spirit lives in us and we're just praying his Spirit would help us in that.

In the writing of a prophet named Isaiah long ago, there is another picture of love. It pictures a time when the corrupt world is set aright by God. All of the violence, injustice, and hate has faded away and in its place is a profound peace. Out of love for the world, God had set in balance everything that had been distorted.

The transformation from the status quo is so profound and difficult to understand in this picture that analogies had to be used to illustrate what this new picture of God's world looks like. Isaiah wrote,

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

How amazing and transformative is love and peace that natural predators and prey would even lay down together as friends.

This passage of course is talking about much more than animals, but the way that people relate with one another and the world. In this balanced world, those who hate each other would find a new space for love that is stronger than the enmity had been between them.

Picture, Kim Jong-un of North Korea becoming an honest and generous host to South Korea's Moon Jae-in without any ulterior motive, but simply to love his neighbor.

This would be the power of love in the world!

Or consider the unstable situation in the Congo from where six families recently fled for fear of harm and arrived at Freedom House Detroit.

In the Congo, there are about a hundred armed groups that terrorize small communities in weakly governed areas. As a result, the United Nations estimates there are 4.5 million people displaced, and more than 800,000 people who have sought refuge or asylum outside the country.

Imagine these militant group leaders, refashioning their guns into shovels and plows and helping these small farming communities plant new crops out of a self-less concern for their well being.

This would be the power of love in the world!

Why do we love? Because love gives us access to a different way to live. It is stronger than hate and violence, and greater than any division. It is our highest calling. In fact it is what we were made for.

Love isn't like a side project we take when it's convenient. To be authentic, love is a way of life that permeates all of us.

So, we love, even our enemies.

When we live in love, we live the way God created us to live for the sake of the world, but also for our sake.

A man named John had a lot to say about the profound and all-encompassing way of love. He wrote about how Jesus' example compels us to love.

READ 1 JOHN 4:7-21

And when it says "brother and sister" the intent is broader than biological relationship. It is larger than simple friend circles, or people with common interests. It is bigger than geographic community.

When John wrote about loving brothers and sisters, he was addressing our connection with all people including those we consider enemies, the ones we are quite sure may hate us.

The road of love is not an easy path, because we live in a world that is full of violence, hatred and corruption.

But when we live the way of love, something resonates deep within us, and we will know that it is the path most consistent with our human nature. It is the life we are meant to live.