

“Keeping Love Alive”

Date: February 10, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Valentine’s Day (pre)

Theme: Love, Relationships

Texts: Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-30

Valentine’s Day is just a couple of days away, that traditional day of romance and love. And so I thought we would talk a little bit about what it takes to keep love alive. Love is a gift from God, shared between two people. When it is fresh and young it is a beautiful thing. But before very long, love can be taken for granted and after a while even disappear. What does it take to keep love alive? First, a story on how not to do it:

A husband was in big trouble when he forgot his wedding anniversary. His wife told him, “Tomorrow there better be something in the driveway for me that goes from zero to 200 in two seconds flat.”

The next morning the wife found a small package in the driveway. She opened it and found a brand new bathroom scale. Funeral arrangements for the husband have been set for this Saturday.

The question before us this morning is “What does it take to keep love alive in a relationship?” Before I try to answer that question I just want to acknowledge that Valentine’s Day is an awkward holiday for many people and today’s sermon may feel like its intended for someone else but not you.

You may be single and there isn’t anyone special in your life right now and you’re feeling like this so-called holiday is just another painful reminder of that fact. Please remember it is not a curse to be single. Jesus was a single person all of his life. Many people find very meaningful lives and remain single all of their life. I hope there is something in today’s sermon for you even if there isn’t a special someone in your life right now.

Some of you are divorced, or in the midst of a separation. Valentine's Day may be a painful day for you. I invite you to listen to the message. There may be something here to help you mend your current relationship, or help you in the next one.

And some of you this morning are widows and widowers; your wife or husband is no longer with you. I hope and pray that today, and on Valentine's Day, you will recall happy memories of your loved one. And perhaps there might be something here in case you are considering remarriage. That being said, "What does it take to keep love alive?"

I'm going to offer several suggestions. But as most of you already know, there are no magic formulas to a perfect marriage or relationship. It takes effort. People change over time and each person has to adjust to those changes. Relationships are not static; they will evolve just as the people in them will change. But here are some tried and true tips for a successful marriage.

Suggestion number one – "Mind your manners." It sounds so simple and yet it is often forgotten. Be polite and respectful of your spouse. In every relationship there will be disagreements, but that does not become a reason for calling each other names, insulting the other person or treating your partner in a demeaning way.

Be careful of the way you speak to each other. Husbands, continue to treat her like a queen. Wives, continue to treat him like a king. That's what Paul was trying to get at in this morning's reading from the book of Ephesians.

Some people have interpreted Paul to mean that wives should simply submit to their husbands and do whatever he says. But that is not what Paul is suggesting at all. In the United Methodist Hymnal we have removed

the vow that says women are to honor and *obey* their husbands. Why? Because that vow was too often abused by some men who treated their wives more like slaves than partners.

Paul gives us the biblical model for marriage. BOTH husbands and wives are to be respectful of one another, caring for each other, and concerned about the other's feelings. It is a mutual love, not a one-sided love where the wife does all the giving and the husband does all the taking. It is mutual love and respect. May all of our marriages and relationships reflect that kind of Christ-honoring-respect. Tip number 1: mind your manners.

My second suggestion is “Never stop courting your partner.” For love to stay alive we need to keep romance alive. Couples need to find new ways of being together and enjoying each other's company.

It's been said that whenever a fellow opens the door of a car for his wife, you can either assume that the car is new or the wife is new. There is that tendency to take one another for granted. What with work, the kids, and family obligations, couples often forget to take the time to be together, and to show each other little ways of saying “I love you. You're important to me. You're the most important person in my life.”

Somebody once said, “Before a man gets married, he lies awake in bed all night thinking about what his beloved said. After they are married, he falls asleep before she has finished saying it.” I suspect many of you can identify with that. There is that continuing need for romance in marriage. Tip number two: Never stop courting your partner.

Suggestion number three: “Make your relationship a priority.” Keep your mate in first place. It is so easy to allow work or children or hobbies to crowd out any time, energy or thought we may have for our beloved. When

we're courting, we can't wait to spend time with the one we love. Every minute together is precious. Once a ring is slipped onto a finger and vows are said at the altar, it is so easy to slide into routine.

Early in our marriage, I was still a very young pastor, and I poured myself into my ministry. And guess what? The people of my church loved me for giving so much to the youth ministry and everything else I was involved in. But poor Barb, home with two small children. I had forgotten my first love. And I'm not the only one to whom this happens.

Couples need to schedule time to be together. Schedule a regular date night, or plan a special get-away. Barb and I not only need to get away from our various ministries, we also need to find quiet time when we can talk about us. One of the most penetrating questions she has asked me in our marriage is this one: "How are we doing?"

If you're married, have you had that conversation recently? Each person taking a turn to answer it honestly for themselves. Not superficially, but think deeply about it. How are you doing as a couple? The reason for doing this is not to resurface old conflicts, but simply to do an honest assessment of where you are. Do you feel close to each other, or have you drifted apart emotionally? If you've drifted, what do you want to do about it?

Tip number three – make your relationship a priority.

My fourth and final suggestion today is simply this: "Keep God as a primary focus in your relationship." As a Christian, I believe God is the glue that holds our marriages together. There were times in our 36 years together that I wasn't sure if Barb and I were going to make it – we had our difficulties. But God was the centerpiece, the primary focus of both our lives.

Every couple goes through hard times. I believe God is the great

healer of broken and hurting relationships. When I counsel with couples before doing their wedding, I often compare marriage to a three-legged stool. There is the husband, the wife and there is God. If any one of those three is missing, the stool will collapse.

One of the most intimate times that Barb and I share in our marriage is our early morning prayer time. Before either of us head out the door to our jobs, we sit down on the living room sofa for a time of devotions and prayer. Not every single day, but we try to be as regular as possible.

We read from a devotional book, share a scripture reading, maybe read some pre-written prayers. But then we take time to pray out loud, each of us praying for the other, praying for our children, praying for the things that God has put on our hearts. It is a beautiful time of sharing and I certain it has brought us closer together.

For couples who have never done anything like this, just using the Upper Room devotional and reading it together can be a great beginning.

Friends, I am not naïve enough to think that just because a couple goes to church together, or prays together they will have a happily-ever-after ending to their lives.

But I do believe God will use your commitment to him, if you make him a priority in your marriage, to strengthen your relationship. Jesus invites us to build the foundation of our homes on him – Christ, the solid rock. Tip number four – Make God a priority in your marriage.

There are so many other suggestions I could offer, but I leave you with a recap of these four: 1. Mind your manners; be respectful. 2. Never stop courting your partner; keep romance alive. 3. Make your relationship a priority. And 4. Keep God as a primary focus of your relationship.

Happy Valentine's Day, to one and all. Amen.