

“Love is a Verb”

Date: May 3, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: 1 John 4:7-12; John 15:1-8

Occasion: Easter 5

Themes: Love, God, other religions; heaven and hell

There is a wonderful story of an old woman who spent most of her time just walking through the streets of Strasbourg, in southern France. In one hand she carried a torch and in the other, a pail of water. It was an odd thing to do, and people asked her to explain what she was doing. She would tell them –

“With the torch I will burn up Heaven, and with the water I will put out the fires of Hell. ‘Why?’ you may ask. So that people will love God for Himself and for His love alone, and not out of a fear of Hell or the desire for Heaven. But love for God, only for the love of God.”

This old woman from France understood the first letter of John. Love begins with God; love comes from God and love is the reason we serve God. Not the fear of punishment nor the desire for reward.

The good things we do are not done to impress God. We do good things, we act in love, simply as an expression that God lives in us. If God is love and if God lives in us, then it will show by the way we love others.

The biblical author John, who wrote both the Gospel and the letters that bear his name, made a profound contribution to our understanding of who God is. In very simple terms he explains the principle that underlies all of Creation. In a phrase, “God is love.”

It is so simple, we take it for granted. We’ve heard it for years, but when it was first introduced, it was a revolutionary concept. *God is love*. Not all religions or philosophies understand God that way.

Some oriental religions contend that God is a changeless, unmoved Being, without concern for human life. Pagan religions have deified the sexual, life-force as God. Certain pantheistic religions describe God as nature itself.

Ancient Greek philosophers and some modern-day scientists have conceived of God as pure Mind, Wisdom or Beauty. Religions of morality have confessed God as righteousness, that which is completely good. Some scientists and some eastern religions conceive of God as Energy.

And they all contain some truth. But the insight of the apostle John surpasses them all by defining God's essential nature as love. When we say that God is love, it implies that all of God's activity is loving activity. If God creates, he *creates* with love; if God rules, he *rules* with love; if God judges, he *judges* with love.

Here's the point. God's love is active love. It's not merely some philosophical concept to be debated. It's not an idea that resides in a book somewhere, waiting to be read and discovered. Love is a verb. God is love and His love is active, not passive. God is known in the verbs of the Bible.

You can see God in action by looking at the verbs we use in the Prayer of Great Thanksgiving, which we say during Communion. It gives a partial summary of God's activity:

God *created*; God *formed* us in God's image. God *delivered* the Hebrews from captivity. God *made covenant* to be our God and *spoke* to us through his prophets. And when it was time, God *sent* his Son to be our Savior. Notice the verbs. God is love, and love is known through verbs.

When John says that God is love, it's because he has been thinking about Jesus and the meaning of His life for us. "In this, the love of God was manifest among us that God sent his only Son into the world. Here is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the atonement of our sins."

Here is the source of the Christian's strength and power to do good in the world. It is rooted in the God who loves us first. God's love comes before our love. We love others because God first loved us. And we see that, we experience that, in the love of Jesus Christ.

We have the capacity to love others because we have been loved first. Jesus, in the Gospel lesson today, uses the image of a grape-vine to describe our relationship to Himself. He said that He is the vine and we are the branches. To be fruitful, to live a life of love, we have to stay connected to Him. A cute, little story to illustrate:

A newspaper reporter interviewed a successful entrepreneur. "How did you do it?" he asked. "How did you make all this money?"

"I'm glad you asked," the successful businessman replied. "It's actually a wonderful story. You see, when my wife and I married, we started with a roof over our heads, some food in the pantry, and five cents between us. I took that nickel, went down to the grocery store and bought an apple. I shined it up and then sold it for ten cents."

"What did you do then?" asked the reporter. "Well," he said, "then I bought two more apples, shined them up, and sold them for 20 cents." The news reporter thought this would be a great human interest story, so he excitedly asked, "Then what?"

"Then my father-in-law died and left us 20 million dollars."

That man prospered not because of his own ingenuity, but because he was connected. Connected. Think about that word. What does it mean to be connected? It means power. We hear someone say, “I have connections.” It means, “I have access to power. I can get it done.”

When we have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we are connected. We are connected to the Source of Life itself, to the God who is known as Love. Our capacity, dear friends, to be the loving Christians that God calls us to be is found in our connection to Jesus Christ.

It is by staying connected to Christ, like the branches to the vine, that we are able to love. Abide in Him and He will abide in you. There is the source for your strength for loving others.

Love is a verb. Love is forgiving and forgetting. Love is shaking hands instead of shaking a fist at someone. Love is calling, it is sending, it is visiting. Love is giving and caring. Love is helping and sharing and listening. Love is hugging and smiling and crying and laughing and weeping with another. Love is a verb.

If we say that we love God, then our love will be seen in the verbs of our life. Go forth now, to love one another. Abide in Christ so that you may stay connected to the source of all Love. And remember, love is not just an idea. Love is a verb. “They will know we are Christians by our love.” Amen? Amen!