4-28/29-18 Rev. Amy Haines

1 John 3:16-24 Love is a Verb Easter Season Series

How do you know when someone loves you? Do you know because they say the words “I love you”? Or do you know because they show love in many ways, large and small, significant and goofy?

Earlier this year I taught a class on Dr. Gary Chapman’s *The Five Love Languages.* In his books Dr. Chapman reminds us that we are all wired in different ways to receive love. Some men and women need to **hear** “I love you” primarily spoken through words of affirmation. Other men and women need to **see** “I love you” primarily lived out through acts of service or receiving gifts. Not everyone has the same primary love language. Yet everyone has the same basic human need for love. And no matter what our love language is, all of us need to give and receive love both in words and in actions.

Unfortunately, in the English language we only have one word for love. So we love our spouses and our children; we love our pets and our possessions; we love our ball teams and our exercise routines; we love our chocolate and our cheesecake; we love our church and our God. We use the same word for all of those categories, yet how we love is expressed in many different ways.

Our culture then teaches us, intentionally or unintentionally, that love for self comes above all else. We are taught to put our own careers and pleasures first. We are trained to only serve others when we can receive credit or when it benefits us. We hoard rather than give. We live in plush abundance rather than basic simplicity. We mistrust the words of others. We become skeptical of the actions of others. We do not follow good role models for love and compassion, for forgiveness and grace.

This love for self even seeps into our striving to be the church. We become inward focused,

focusing more on our own needs, rather than outward focused, focusing on the needs of those in our communities. We want what is best for our own households rather than what is best for the entire congregation. We yearn to protect and preserve rather than let go and let God move us into a new direction.

If we learn about love only from the culture around us, we will never get to the heart of love

as described today in the letter of 1 John. While we may be familiar with God’s love as declared by 1 Corinthians 13 and John 3:16, this little letter of 1 John packs more references to love into its verses than any other book or letter of the New Testament! [35x]

This letter calls us to love!

First and foremost, we love because God first loved us.

From the beginning our Scriptures are a love story, the story of God’s relentless, forgiving and renewing love. Even when we sin, even when we fall short of living in ways God expects us to live, God won’t give up on us. Even when we intentionally turn away from God, God continues to reach out to us.

God loves us. And as John 3:16 proclaims: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

 (NRSV 3.16)

God’s love was made visible on this earth through God’s Son Jesus. 1 John 3:16 proclaims:

“This is how we’ve come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us.”

(MSG 3.16a)

God’s love was made visible through Jesus’ compassion and teachings, through his challenges and healings, and most of all through his death and resurrection.

God loves us. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more, and nothing we can do to make God love us less.

So how do we respond to such love? Through belief and love.

1 John 3:23 proclaims: “And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.” (NRSV)

We are called to believe in Jesus, as our Savior and our Lord. Then out of that belief, living with such faith as our foundation, we are called to love others as God has loved us.

We are not only to say we love Jesus; we are called to show that love to others. So we love in word and action. We live in ways that show love is a verb.

Love is a verb—This phrase has been a part of my faith journey since the late 80s, when one of our youth mission trip t-shirts proclaimed “love is a verb.” During that mission trip week my friends and I were challenged to live out our love for Jesus not only in our home repair work but also in our interactions with the families, with one another, and with whoever else we encountered on that trip. We were taught that week that love is more than emotion, love is more than a warm tingly feeling, love is instead a choice to be lived out in tangible ways. At the end of that week, when we returned home, we were encouraged to continue to remember that love is a verb, and to live by love in our interactions with one another, with classmates, with our families, and with our neighbors.

It is easy to say we live by love. Yet how much harder is it to live by love, especially with those closest to us? I often say to couples getting married that love is what will keep them going on those days when they won’t like each other very well. It is easy to say we will forgive others as God has forgiven us. Yet how much harder is it to truly forgive those who have hurt us, especially when they are closest to us? It is easy to say I will pray for you. Yet how much harder is it to honestly pray for others, especially those with whom we don’t get along, and pray for God’s guidance and grace?

The foundational verse for us today in this passage is verse 18.

The NRSV proclaims:

“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

..Clarence Jordan in his Cotton Patch Version of the Bible, translated verse 18 to read:

“My little ones, let’s not talk about love. Let’s not sing about love.

Let’s put love into action and make it real.”

 - Homiletics 5-7-06 “Get in the Box” adapted

Eugene Peterson in The Message declared:

“My dear children, let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love.”

Real love is love that comes from the heart, love that is in response to God’s great love for us,

love that is lived out not only in what we say but especially in what we do.

This real love is what transformed the disciples when they embraced the good news of Easter morning. They began the day behind locked doors, fearful for their lives, not believing the words they heard from the women. They Jesus appeared among them, and they began to believe. As the church grew following the Holy Spirit’s presence at Pentecost, Christians were known not only by their incredible story of the Son of God killed then risen from the dead,

they were also known by their love, by the way they responded to such good news with no fear of death and a renewed energy to love others. They were known for the way they cared for one another, including the outcast, the widows, and even foreigners among their midst. The disciples’ lives were transformed in response to Jesus’ love for them, and they began to love others in words and in actions.

Pastor Guy Caley imagines:

.. Real love looks less like two beautiful Hollywood stars arm in arm on the beach and looks more like a room on the cancer ward where a loving husband reassures his bride ravaged by disease that she’s still the most beautiful girl in the world to him.

[Real] Love looks less like big donations made publicly to have a wing of the hospital named for the donor and more like an anonymous hero laboring by the sweat of her brow in the shadows.

[Real] Love looks less like gushing letters promising unending devotion and more like a spouse hurt, betrayed and confused, deciding to forgive and work things out.

[Real] Love is accepting others as less than perfect, but still choosing to think the best rather than assume the worst.

Real love is not some giddy feeling I get when I think about a special person, real love is a decision to place someone’s welfare above my own when I don’t feel particularly warm and fuzzy about them.

-- Guy Caley sermoncentral.com 8-06 “Real Love”

Real love is not just something we do because we feel good doing it. Real love is a choice to follow Jesus even when we wish to run away in the opposite direction.

According to Facebook, today is [Saturday was] “Pay It Forward Day”. A day to do something kind for someone else without expecting anything in return. While it is good to be kind to another just because, we are called to be kind, to choose love, to sacrifice for another in order to reflect our faith in Jesus. To not just live by love on a specific day but every day.

..Former President Jimmy Carter has given of his time, talent and resources for many years to be a living witness for Christ through the building of houses and the betterment of lives with Habitat for Humanity International. Habitat has been a practical way President Carter has shared the love of Christ. One year he was working on a house in the Philippines near where the famous Bataan death march of World War II began. It was a very hot day, and as President Carter and the others worked, their bodies were covered by sweat. The homeowner was later asked what meant the most to him about the project. He replied that one day as he watched,

he noticed that as President Carter worked with the mortar, some of his sweat fell into the mix.

The homeowner continued by saying he knew his walls were blessed with the sweat of President Carter in them.

 --adapted from The Rev. Dr. B. Wiley Stephens Day1.net 5-7-06

Love in word and action, love that follows our Savior Jesus, is sacrificial love.

1 John reminds us once again: “This is how we’ve come to understand and experience love:

Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God’s love?

It disappears. And you made it disappear.” (MSG v16-17)

You and I most likely will never be asked to die for one another. Yet we are called to love one another sacrificially. Maybe our sacrifice is through our tithes; maybe our sacrifice is giving our time to work with children or greet newcomers; maybe our sacrifice is pushing past disagreements and hurts; maybe our sacrifice is being willing to see and assist another in need.

Again, this passage is talking here about loving those closest to us. How much of a challenge is that to do so? If we see a brother or sister in need within the congregation, are we afraid of offending them to risk asking if there is any way we can help? If we see a brother or sister in need within the congregation, do we ignore that need rather than push through the church’s red tape to help that person?

How has God called you to love others through sacrificial action?

Many of you may be aware of the famous drawing called *The Praying Hands* by German artist Albrecht Durer. ..There is a legend behind the painting that tells of two struggling artists.

One is a musician whose goal in life was to play and compose music to the glory of God. Durer, the other of the two, was a painter and engraver. It was a struggle for the two to survive, and the musician began to work in the fields to help support the work of Durer. By the time Durer gained enough notoriety to be self-supportive, the friend's hands had become too hardened

to return to his career in music. The legend is that those hands have become the model for the famous praying hands. Laying down one's life is not always a matter of life or death, but it could be a time of postponing or canceling dreams and plans so that another might fulfill their dreams or plans.

-Rev. Dr. B. Wiley Stephens Day1.net 5-7-06

We are called to love others sacrificially and practically, in word and action, as a response to God’s great love for us. Each time you tithe, each time you share how a prayer has been answered, each time you give to a food pantry, those are times when you share the love of Jesus. Each time you teach a child a Bible story, each time you tell a friend Jesus loves them,

each time you stop judging another person by the color of their skin, those are times when you share the love of Jesus. Each time you work together, each time you pray for one another,

each time you quietly meet a need, those are times when you share the love of Jesus.

Love is a verb. Love is a choice. Love is to be shown through word and speech and truth and action. As we leave here today, may we see and know Jesus’ love through our love for one another. May we share and declare the good news of Jesus through our love for our community. May we be known as followers of Jesus who love.

May it be so. Let us pray.