

Sermon for December 20, 2020

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“What Are We Waiting For?” Part IV (ADVENT)

Scripture: John 13:31-35

When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

INTRODUCTION:

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. As you may have noticed, we are back to purple this week with the Advent Candle. Last week was Pink because we were midway through Advent and that Sunday is usually a break in the fast leading up to the Great Feast of Christmas in the liturgical calendar.

This is the Fourth part of our series called “What Are We Waiting For?”. The first week we focused on hope as our first candle of Advent. The second week was on the message of faith and preparation in faith formation. The third candle of Advent represents joy. And today we focus on the fourth theme of Advent “love”.

PART ONE: LOVE HAS MANY MEANINGS

Jesus gives the commandment that we are to love one another. But how we show and communicate love is often misunderstood. It is because love is so vast and different that it can be a very confusing thing.

Love is complicated and has many parts to it. In English we use just one word for love, but in other languages there are multiple words for different kinds of love. For example, in Greek there are three common words to describe different kinds of love.

Eros - A Passionate Love

This word describes a type of love that invokes a physical reaction. It is a passionate kind of love that connects with our senses. It can be used to describe a meal someone loves that stimulates the sense of taste and smell. It is used in regards to love that is felt through senses.

Philos - A Family Type Love

Philos describes a family kind of love in the way members of a family love one another. It can refer to the love siblings have for one another. The city of Philadelphia combines this Greek word Philos meaning brotherly with the Greek word Delphi meaning city. That is where we get the city of brotherly love from with Philadelphia. The word Philos can also describe the kind of love between a parent and a child.

Agape - An Unconditional Love (Divine Love).

Then there is the Greek word Agape, which refers to a divine unconditional love. This is a love that is not dependent on whether we are righteous or sinners, we are all loved by God unconditionally. We cannot earn favor with God, we are accepted by God because God's love is unconditional. It is why the scriptures say that God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, so that we might not perish but have eternal life. Agape is a holy kind of love.

PART TWO: A PARENT'S LOVE

The beauty of Christmas is the image of Mary and Joseph in the stable holding the baby Jesus. It is a visual reminder of the love a parent has for their child after birth. I will share that nothing changed me or reshaped my theology of the world more than when I became a father. I learned to love the way a parent loves. And there are lots of ways that parents show love to their children.

Sacrificial Love

For example, there is sacrificial love. I love my children dearly but there are times when it feels like children just suck the life out of you. And because

parents love their children they give and give and give so sacrificially. We get up at 6 AM to make the soccer practices or hockey games. We work to provide for them with all the good things in life. We do all the laundry and cook all the meals to ensure they are cared for. Parents make sacrifices for their children out of love. A parent's love is a sacrificial love.

Corrective Love

A parent's love can also be a corrective kind of love. We correct our children because we love them. We teach them right from wrong and give them the honest truth even when they may not want to hear it. The response is often "that is not fair" or "you hate me". And the truth is, we correct our children because we love them. We want the best for them and to help guide them to be successful in life. Corrective love can be hard as a parent, but it is also extremely necessary. So, a parent's love is also a type of corrective love.

Comforting Love

And then there is comforting love. This is the type of love that is reassuring. It is the type of love a parent gives when a child hits that point of everything just falling apart in the world. We can see when our children are hurting and have hit a point of desperation, and we just hold them in our arms and comfort them. We put their head on our shoulder and tell them it will be OK to comfort them. This is an incredible kind of love that all children need from their parents. Sometimes we just need to be comforted when we hit the wall, and everything seems to be falling apart. A parent's love also includes comforting love.

PART 3: THEY WILL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE

The Church embodies the Love of God. Jesus instructed his disciples to follow a new commandment which is to love one another. He said his disciples would be known by this new commandment of loving one another.

We seek to Love Unconditionally

We the Church should love others unconditionally. It doesn't matter how righteous a person is or how much of a sinner they are, they are equally and unconditionally loved by God. "God loves us, accepts us as we are, no

matter what we have done, God loves us". That was the mission statement for my ministry I started over 22 years ago when I entered into ministry as a Pastor.

As I said before, fatherhood changed me profoundly. I remember when I became a father sitting in the hospital with my newborn son in a room at the end of the hall on the hospital wing. It was called a sunroom to sit and enjoy sunlight in. As I held my newborn son in my arms, I looked out across the parking lot from the hospital and saw a prison. And I thought how many fathers held their sons the way I was holding mine and now visit them in that prison across the street. It helped me to understand unconditional love. Just because we make mistakes in life, some people will never stop loving us. God's love is unconditional. Just because someone makes a mistake doesn't mean they are not loved or don't have worth. Those sons in that prison were loved by God.

We the Church must love like God, unconditionally. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Yet even in our sinful nature we are loved by God.

We seek to Correct Lovingly

The Church should love one another and when necessary correct in love. We are our brothers and sister's keeper. We need to encourage and speak the truth when needed for correction. It is out of love that we seek to walk together in support of one another.

I will never forget years ago serving on a church council where we had to decide how to help a member who had fallen back into addiction. The person had given up the addiction and come to Christ. We welcomed that person into membership of the church. But when they returned to the addiction we felt it necessary to help that member to recover again. It was decided that three members of the church would go and speak to this person. I was one of the ones elected to go and counsel this brother in Christ. We shared that we would take the person to appointments and help them get back into a recover program. The church would remove the person as a member of the church but would stand by to support him. Once he went back through the recovery program, we would welcome him back into being a member of the church. This process is how the church historically would correct a member in love. It doesn't get done very often nowadays.

He went through the recovery program and came out of it back as a recovered person. He was able to take control of the addiction. Just recently I received word that he passed away. I was able to share with his daughter that I remembered the day he gave his life to Christ and how we celebrated his recovery from addiction. I said I knew because of his amazing life and how important his relationship with Jesus was that I had full assurance of his salvation and that he now is with Christ in heaven.

We seek to Love Compassionately

The Church should always show compassionate love. We as the Federated Church are a compassionate church. Just this past week I spoke with several members of agencies that help those in need in the community with housing insecurity. It is getting especially cold. I shared we will always be a compassionate church in caring for those in need because that is what Jesus has called us to do. I stated we couldn't do it all by ourselves and we needed all the agencies in the community to work together to find better solutions to care for the needs of those in the community.

The church is called to be a place of compassionate love, which is why so many come to the church when they need help. They know us for our compassionate love.

PART 4: LOVE IS A GIFT FROM GOD

Weddings

Love is so many different things. When we talk of love, I often think of it in the contexts of weddings. I share with the couple that love is a gift from God. When two people find each other and truly make each other happy it is a gift from God. The passage from 1 Corinthians 13 of "love is patient, and kind; it keeps no record of wrong, it is not boastful or arrogant". Love is a gift from God.

Hallmark Movie Channel

This time of year, I have been enjoying a lot of movies on the Hallmark Channel. And if you watch those movies you know how cheesy they can be. The story always seems to be the same. The boy likes the girl but she doesn't know. Or the girl likes the boy and he doesn't know. There is always someone who doesn't know the hints being dropped of how one person is

secretly in love with the other person. And that is because people's love languages are often misunderstood.

Five Love Languages

The Five Love Languages is a book written by Gary Chapman on this subject. People often have a love language they use to express their love to others. The five main love languages are as follows.

- **Words of Affirmation** – This is the person who always offers encouragement or kind words to uplift those who they love.
- **Acts of Service** – This is the person who may not verbally use words but does chores and errands to let the person know they are loved. It may be clearing the frost off their windshield on a cold day or running an errand without being asked to show they care and love the person.
- **Receiving Gifts** – This person takes the time to find the perfect gift to give someone to show how much they care. They will spend hours looking for the right gift to give.
- **Quality Time** – This is the person who will always make time for a person they love. They are the type who will drop everything and carve out time to be with the person they love. They give time as their gift of love.
- **Physical Touch** – This comes down to the two types of people. The huggers and the non-huggers. People who use physical touch are usually huggers. They show their love through touch.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, you can see love can mean many things to many people. Love is complicated because there are so many ways to show love. As we conclude this season of Advent with the theme of love, consider how you can communicate love to someone who needs to know they are loved this time of year. In whatever way or language that you use to communicate love, be sure to make that love known. Don't be like the Hallmark Movies. Tell the people you love that you love them.