

“Why Love?”
Colossians 1:2-6

July 14, 2019

5th Sunday after Pentecost

“All You Need is Love” or so the Beatles sang in a song released 52 years ago last Sunday. The implication in this song (and in many songs of that era) is that, if people would just love each other more, then all the problems of the world could be solved. Some may believe this. Others might feel it to be a bit naïve. But the Beatles weren’t the first people to ever express this idea about love. Many musicians have sung about it. Countless poets have written about it. Not a few counselors for people involved in conflict, strife, or bad relationships, have suggested it. Probably all churches encouraged it. However, even if love could so completely change the world like John Lennon and Paul McCartney said it could, why would you even want to love?

That seems like a very odd question. Of course, we *want* to love, don’t we? Or are we just in love with the idea of loving? I mean really: as much as people talk about love, fantasize about love, write songs upon songs about love and as much as counselors and clergy encourage love, love is not a very easy thing to do.

People are not very lovable. People hurt us, criticize us, reject us, and do bad things to us. It’s not easy to love such people. Even in our homes where love is supposed to reign, love may be in short supply. Children rebel against parents and disobey. Parents may become angry at children for their behavior and yell or scream at them. Spouses may exchange hostile words as they argue and fight with one another. Divorces are often explained as necessary because love has died.

Even in our church where we hear Jesus say, “Love one another as I have loved you,” and “Love your neighbor as you love yourself,” we may find it hard to love our fellow church members. They may annoy us or say bad things about us. Frustrations over decisions made in voters meetings, how to deal with financial difficulties or whose job it is to do something around the church may lead us to get angry at a fellow member of the body of Christ instead of loving that person; gossiping to dozens of people about an offense committed against us instead of going to that person directly to resolve the problem with forgiveness, or running off to another church when one doesn’t get one’s way or dropping out of church altogether.

Who wants to have love for people like that? Oh, we will speak about loving other people, but is it really love that we have or simply a feeling we experience on the basis of what another person can do for us? As noble as many musicians and poets make it out to be, what passes for love today is often quite shallow and self-centered. We say we love people, but that is often for those people who do nice things for us. If they stop, then our love may stop as well. We love people as long as they agree with us or are nice to us, but should they disagree or say something negative about us, then our love for them may dry up. We may love boyfriend or girlfriend, husband or wife, as long as that thrill or feeling of love is there, but if we don’t “feel” love anymore, then a breakup or a divorce is forthcoming.

This is not the kind of love upon which to build a life or a future. This is not the kind of love which is going to solve the problems of the world. In fact, it may be a reason for increasing problems in our world. The cynical person might think the

solution is to accept that understanding of love and try to get as many things to love as possible. The jaded person might despair of there being any kind of love at all and so quit trying to love. In any case, with this is our definition of love, it is very difficult to answer the question, "Why love?"

But there is a love, a love that if this was all you had (as the song says) would be enough. I'm talking about the biblical concept of love. The Greek word is *agape* and this kind of love is different than any which we can manufacture on our own. It is the kind of love which God has.

What makes *agape* such a different kind of love? *Agape* is not a feeling of the heart, but an act of the will. *Agape* is a commitment to another person which is not based on what that person can do for me, but on what I can do for that person. The existence and continuance of this kind of love is not dependent upon circumstances being good, me feeling happy, or any other benefit for the one who loves, but exists and continues simply because I have willed it to be so.

We see this kind of love which God had when He created the world and shared its wonders with the pinnacle of his creation, humanity. Adam and Eve had done nothing to earn or deserve the world and everything in it. They certainly couldn't compensate God for it. God simply did this because He loved. He shared what He had done with Adam and Eve because He loved them without expecting anything in return.

Now, you might have thought this love which God had for Adam and Eve might have vanished or at least grown dim when they sinned. If you or I were in God's place, that might've happened. God could just take His ball and go home. Surely now, several thousand years later, you might think that God's love would fail when dealing with people who not only don't believe in him, but hate and oppose him

But the continuance of that love like the beginning of that love was not dependent upon the recipients being worthy of it or God getting something out of it. God continued to love. In fact, when Jesus taught the depth of God's love and urging people to show the same love, He increased the scope of our love from simply our friends, our family, and those who love us back. He said, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:44-45)

That's strong love, but there's more. God's love has provided for more than simply our earthly needs (although that would've been plenty). God loved us enough to provide for our eternal need: forgiveness for the sins which we had done to separate ourselves from God and salvation from eternal death which our sins had earned. A love based on feeling would have failed because there was nothing in us to make God "feel" like saving us. A love based on what we could do for God would have failed because there is absolutely nothing we could do for God.

God did not love only the "good people" of the people (there were none). God so loved the world and God did not love the world so that he might receive. God so loved the world that he gave. And what he gave was the dearest and most precious treasure he had: His only Son. His love moved Him to give up His Son who was holy and perfect on behalf of humanity which is sinful and horribly imperfect.

St. Paul sums it up in his letter to the Romans, saying, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6-8)

Jesus’ love for His Father was not based on what was good for Jesus. Jesus left His throne on high to come to earth. Yet, out of love for His Father, Jesus obeyed His Father’s will completely and perfectly. Jesus’ love for us was not based on what felt good. Jesus would have to die on a cross in order to gain forgiveness for all of our sin. Yet, out of love for us and all people, Jesus made the perfect and all-inclusive sacrifice by willingly offering up His life on the cross, thus, forgiving our sins and freeing us from death’s hold on us and giving us eternal life.

The love of which the Bible speaks and which is the love which God has for us, is not some squishy feeling which can change from one day to the next. It is a love which is not extended to us because we have earned it, but precisely because we haven’t earned it. It is a love which does not benefit God, the lover, but only benefits the object of his love, namely, us. Therefore, do not think of what passes for love in this world when you hear about God’s love. God’s love is so much better and different.

God’s love means that He will always forgive us, regardless of the seriousness of our sin or the quantity of our sins. God’s love will always care for us in our physical needs, no matter what our situation is. God’s love calls us to love others in the same way that He has loved us: as an act of the will and not just the feeling of the heart; with an endless supply for all and not a limited supply for only the deserving; beginning with those in the household of faith and extending to any and all.

This is the kind of love which we want, not only to receive, but to show to those around us. This is the kind of love which can change our family, our church, our community, and even the world. But how can we practice this kind of love? Let’s look at the Colossians in our text for today. St. Paul had not established his church and it is likely he never met any of its members. Yet he had received reports about the congregation’s progress from friends. So, when he began his letter to them, he introduced himself as was the custom of the day and then said, “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.”

Notice how St. Paul links together the faith and the love of the Colossians in his commendation of them. It is easy for us to remember that faith is a gift of God as Paul writes to the Ephesians. However, we seem to think that love is something we must come up with on our own. That is not true love is as much a gift of God, given to us by grace for the sake of Christ as is faith. As we completely and totally rely upon God for faith, created in the waters of Holy Baptism and strengthened and sustained by the Word of God, so also, we completely and totally rely upon God for love. As God gives you the faith to trust in Him, so also He gives you the love to love others.

How do we do this? St. Paul goes on to tell the Colossians how exactly it is that they had faith in God and loved like God for others. He says, “[It is] because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.” On the surface, this may not seem to be much and

that is because of our misunderstanding of the biblical concept of “hope”. In our day and age, “hope” means a wish for something to happen. However, in the Word of God, “hope” is much stronger. “Hope is trust with the certainty that God will fulfill his promises.” (p. 32)

What we hope in, St. Paul says, is “laid up for you in heaven.” An inheritance is something of great worth which most certainly belongs to us already and is received by us when someone dies. Like any inheritance on earth, our hope in heaven – eternal life – is something of greatest importance which is already ours by virtue of someone (Jesus) dying and will be received by us most certainly when we die and rise again by virtue of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

With this great certainty in mind, we are free and able to trust in God to deliver eternal life to us, no matter what situation we face here on earth. In the same way, we are free and able to love with the love God has for us no matter what situation we may face here on earth. All the petty little disagreements, backbiting, lack of love that we show, especially the saints but even to our enemies simply don’t matter anymore. They will all be wiped away at the receiving of our inheritance in heaven. Because we are assured of our future due to the love God has for us in His Son, Jesus Christ, we are free to have that love for one another. We have, not only the desire to love as we have been loved, but the strength to do so. As we can believe because of God’s grace, we can also love because of God’s grace.

This all came and still comes today because, as St. Paul says, they had “heard before in the Word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you as indeed in the whole world that is bearing fruit and growing.” Again, this is why we gather around the Word of God in the reading and preaching and the body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the Holy Supper. We gather to receive forgiveness for all of our sins to benefit ourselves and to receive the love of God to benefit those whom we serve. In fact, in the city of Corinth, the Lords Supper was often referred to as the Agape Meal – the meal of love.

So, love everyone – friends and enemies; good and bad; believers and unbelievers; – with the love of God which, you have freely received and are free to give now because of the certain hope you have for the future. Love by the power of the Gospel which saved you and now empowers you. Love in sincerity and truth; in actions, as well as in words; when we are present in this facility and when we are not.

Is it true that “All You Need is Love? It depends. If we are talking about the changeable feeling of love which seeks only its own good, love is not only not all you need, but it is not what you need it all. If we’re talking about the love of God based on His unchanging will with which He loved us, lived for us, died in our place, and rose again for us and which seeks only the welfare of the other and is done by the grace of God for the hope we have, then “All You Need *is* Love.” Amen.