

## The Greatest Love of All!

In The Gospel of John chapter 15:9-17, we read these words: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit--fruit that will last--and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other."

We are born totally self-centered and totally helpless. In order to survive in this world, we must make our needs known. If those needs are met, then we will probably grow to love those meeting our needs. But, is that really love? We say that children have to be taught to hate, but isn't that true of love as well? Think how difficult it is to teach a child to share. Is it really something that happens naturally? Is it something that comes from within? Or is it something we learn as infants and then as children, first of all, from our primary caregivers and then from those around us?

C.S. Lewis, distinguish between "Need Love" & "Gift Love." Need love should be self-evident. It is the most common kind of love in our world. I love you because you meet my needs. It might be that my self-esteem is boosted when I am with you or it might be simply my need to be loved. Most of us have a need for companionship. Need love is always born of emptiness. The person characterized by need love is always grasping to attain from other things or values which he or she covets. Lewis contends that many times when we humans say to another, "I love you," what we are really meaning is, "I need you, I want you. You have a value that I very much desire to make my own, no matter what the consequence may be to you."

Now contrast "Need Love" with what Lewis calls "Gift Love." Instead of being born of emptiness or lack, this form of loving is born of fullness. The goal of gift love is to enrich and enhance the person whom we love rather than to extract value from them. "Gift love moves out to bless and to increase rather than to acquire or to diminish. Gift love is more like a bountiful, artesian well that continues to overflow than a vacuum or a black hole." Lewis concludes that is what God's love is all about. In other words, God's love is gift love, not need love. This, of course, is the meaning of agape love.

Are we capable of agape love--that is, loving as God loves? To a certain extent we are, but this does not happen naturally for human beings. For us to substitute gift love for need love, we must go to the source of love and the source of all love is God. Jesus says in our lesson for today, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." Love, then, doesn't come from within--it comes from above!

Later, in his first epistle John writes, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God." Where does love come from? It comes from God. John continues, "Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." So, that is the answer to the first question: where does love come from? It comes from God. Then John adds, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:7-11).

The ultimate personification of LOVE is Jesus Christ! "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." That is what love looks like and this love that we receive as a gift is only experienced when we pass it on to others. Jesus said Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command"

Where does love come from? It comes from God alone. What does it look like? It looks like a man hanging on a cross in our behalf. What does such love require out of us? It requires us to move beyond need love to gift love. To look around at others who are in need of God's love and to give it to them--not asking what they can do for us, but remembering what Christ has done for us. "This is my command," Jesus said to his disciples, and also to us: "Love each other."