

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

<sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:7-21 (NIV)

<sup>7</sup>Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

<sup>13</sup>This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. <sup>16</sup>And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. <sup>17</sup>This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

<sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup>Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup>And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Love. All of us need it. No one survives without it. It is the subject of thousands, if not millions, of songs, poems, novels, movies, and yes, even sermons!

What is love?

Here are a few responses from some youngsters:

"Love is when your puppy licks your face, even after you left him alone all day."

"Love is when Mommy sees Daddy, all smelly and sweaty, and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford."

"Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends, even after they know each other so well."

"Love is what is in the room with you at Christmas, if you stop opening presents, and listen."

"Love is when someone hurts you, and you get so mad, but you don't yell at them because you know it would hurt their feelings."

"When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth." (What is Love—from a kid's point of view, LightSinger, 3.14.02)

Love is central to our Christian faith, for we believe that we were created by a loving God to be in a personal relationship with that same Creator, as well as for loving relationships with one another, and with the world that God created for us.

The English language is limited to one word, which we use to describe our affection for friends and family, our devotion and deep commitment to our spouse, as well as our preference for a favorite football team or for Pepperoni Pizza: Love! In each instance we mean something quite different!

In NT Greek, there are four words for love, each one expressing a different nuance of the word.

EROS—is descriptive of romantic, sensual love.

STORGE—is descriptive of love of friendship.

PHILEO—is descriptive of familial love or “brotherly love”, hence Philadelphia is the “city of brotherly love”.

AGAPE—is descriptive of God’s sacrificial and unconditional love for us, expressed most eloquently in the life/death/resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the Love of which John writes in his letter which we heard read this morning.

Let me tell you about Mary. Mary was 5 years old when her parents divorced. Raised by a single mom, Mary’s dad had visitation but rarely took advantage of it. He’d write and phone occasionally. Promises were made many times about visits but he frequently came up with excuses: his car broke down, he had to work, etc. From the age of 9 until she was 15 she did not see him at all. Through these experiences she learned that when he said or wrote: “I love you with all my heart”, he did not mean it. Words without action were hollow.

John writes in the previous chapter: 1 John 3:18

***“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”***

This is in fact, how God communicates.

God demonstrated or proved his love for us, according to the apostle Paul, in Romans 5:8. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Furthermore, John in the previous chapter (I John 3:16) tells us “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.”

Hence our love for one another is a by-product of God’s loving generosity toward us, and what motivates or inspires our love for others. When God’s Spirit indwells us or lives within us, it would be natural that it would be expressed in how we conduct ourselves in the world. God’s love is made complete as it is then lived out and shared in and through our relationships with one another.

In 1952, Pusan, Korea two best friends were side by side in a foxhole, awaiting orders. Richard Manning and Ray Brennan ad grown up together. Now they were casually eating chocolate bars, when suddenly a hand grenade landed next to Ray. Manning recalls that his friend casually tossed aside his candy wrapper, threw his body on the grenade, and winked lovingly at his best friend, before the grenade exploded underneath him.

Eight years later, when it came time for Manning to enter the Franciscan priesthood, he adopted a new name, as was the custom at ordination. Because of the sacrifice of his best friend, he took the name Brennan as his first name, and has been known ever since as Brennan Manning. His hope was to live as sacrificially as his friend had.

Some years later, the priest who had gained some following for his spiritual writing and as a conference speaker, was struggling with depression. He went to visit his adopted mom—the mother of his childhood friend Raymond. Together they reminisced about crazy things the two boys had done together during their childhood and teens. Unable to shake his depression, he asked her: "Hey ma. Do you think that Ray loved me?"

Her first reaction was nervous laughter. "You say the craziest things, stop joking."

"I'm serious,"he replied.

She exploded in anger: "Don't you ever talk to me about my Raymond like that! *What more could he have done for you?*"

Then she grew quiet. "It's all right. We all need a little reassurance now and then."

*"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."*

(John 15:13) This was true of Richard Brennan. It is true of Jesus Christ.

For several months, we have focused on the various commands that flow from the supreme one: To Love One Another. Look in your bulletin on page

54. There you will find each of the "commands" and scriptures we have considered.

Most weeks we conclude our worship service by holding hands and singing: "They will know we are Christians by our brick building in the center of town". Oh, no?

Ok. "They will know we are Christians by our correct theology and doctrine."

No? I believe that solid theology and doctrine are important, don't you?

Ok. "They will know we are Christians by our positive attitude and encouraging words." No? But aren't positive attitudes and encouraging words important? Yes, sure they are... BUT.

*Remind me, now. What is it we sing?*

*"They will know we are Christians... by our LOVE!"*

Ok. Got it!

But what does this LOVE look like? What behaviors will signal to the people of Enumclaw, our neighbors and newcomers, that we are Christians?

I submit to you, that it is in how well we live out all those commands on p.4 in our relationships with one another. So this morning I am going to give you a few minutes to complete an assignment. (Sorry, it is the school teacher in me!

Reflect/review these commands. Ask yourself: How am I doing on fulfilling these commands? Then, ask yourself, How are we as a church, doing on fulfilling these commands?

Then, do two things:

Give yourself a grade/progress report. Letter grades (A-B-C, etc) morphed at some point into S/satisfactory, N/needs improvement. Either way, how are you and I doing?

Give Calvary (all of us corporately) a grade/progress report.

Are you ready? Get set. Go. (No cheating and looking at your neighbor's paper!!)

Why did I ask you do to this? My intention is not at all to make fun of our song or tradition. I ask you to do this because Jesus said:

<sup>34</sup>"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." John 13:34-36 NIV

The measure of our discipleship is how well we love one another. And how we love one another is measured by how we welcome/etc. one another. (see the list in the bulletin.)

Last week we celebrated the legacy of Rev. Dr. Bob Sargent, who motivated and engaged many to create services that are still impacting the citizens of Enumclaw through the food banks, Plateau Outreach ministries, juvenile justice advocacy, low income housing and more. That was love in action.

What will be your legacy and mine? What are you and I doing today that will have a similar lasting impact?

Fred Rogers was the creator of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," a children's television show that began airing on public tv in 1968 and ran until 2000—that's over 30 years and just short of 900 episodes. (It is still on television in an animated version called Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood.) In 1997, Mr. Rogers won an Emmy lifetime achievement award. This is an excerpt of his speech.

*"So many people have helped me to come to this night. Some of you are here. Some are far away. Some are even in heaven. All of us have special ones who have loved us into being. Would you just take, along with me, 10 seconds to think of the people who have helped you become who you are? Those who have cared about you and wanted what was best for you in life. 10 seconds of silence. I'll watch the time.*

*Whomever you've been thinking about, how pleased they must be to know the difference you feel they've made."*

(The video shows actors and actresses tearing up during and after those ten seconds of silence.) (Fred Rogers' unforgettable Emmy Award speech 1997, Youtube.)

All of us have special people who have "loved us into being" children of God. Some here. Some far away. Some are even in heaven where they join the saints—the Cloud of Witnesses (Hebrews 12), around the throne still praying and offering intercession for us. We all have had spiritual parents or mentors. We are their legacy.

The question for us today is this:

Will you be this person for someone?

Will you be a spiritual parent/mentor that raises children or grows other disciples to follow Jesus and invite others to follow him?

Will it indeed be said of you and me—of Calvary—“see how they love one another”?

By God’s grace, may it be so!

Let us pray...