

## Midweek Message

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34,35 ESV)*

This past Sunday we began a two-part message on the characteristics of genuine faith as revealed in Psalm 84. However, I hope you realize that Psalm 84 won't cover every characteristic that should be found in those who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. One of those characteristics that's not expressed is that of love. Love, that is, genuine Christian love is to be, perhaps, the greatest characteristic that should be evident in every believer's life. And so I'd like to convey in this message a few thoughts about what it means to love as Jesus points out in this passage.

**First**, Jesus calls it a “new commandment” which I believe means a new way of understanding genuine love. It's not that love for God and for others is new, as if it were never required of us before, but that we needed to have a deeper understanding of this love that our Lord requires of us. When Jesus was questioned regarding the moral law as to which is the greatest, He answered in this manner:

*Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31 ESV).*

Since creation the moral law has been in place and as the Apostle Paul tells us it's written on our hearts, that is, we're prewired to love. The issue that keeps us from loving God and others is the problem of our sinfulness brought about by the fall of humanity when Adam and Eve sinned against the Lord in the Garden of Eden. However, genuine love has always been required of every human being, first for God and then from that love to those around us.

**Second**, Jesus tells us that we're to love as He has loved us. I hope you realize that in and of ourselves that kind of love is completely impossible because of our fallen condition. When we consider how Jesus expressed His love we must look to the cross upon which He, who is without sin, willingly sacrificed Himself to pay the debt of our own sins. What's really so amazing about that love is how it wasn't being expressed for good, deserving people but was being lavished upon those who are underserving. The Apostle Paul tells us:

*“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 ESV).*

In that same passage the Apostle Paul talks about our unworthiness by reminding us that we were the very enemies of God and yet, God, in His love, mercy, and grace, chose to express the greatest gift of love we could ever experience. You see, Jesus' love is both sacrificial and unconditional. He completely and unreservedly gave Himself to us so that we could be brought out of our rebellion against God and into a vibrant and loving relationship with Himself.

**Thirdly**, Jesus tells us that this love is to be expressed toward one another. Even though we should treat all people in a loving way, Jesus is talking about our fellow brothers and sisters who belong to the community of faith, the family of God. The Apostle John tells us:

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:7-12 ESV).*

Do you see the connection between the love of God toward us, that fills us, and how it’s meant to flow out from us? If we genuinely have a love for God then we should also be like God in that this love we’ve received from God must also be expressed to those whom God has also expressed His great love of redemption.

**Finally**, Jesus tells us that through this love for one another we reveal God’s love to those who do not yet know Him. He tells us, you see this characteristic of loving sacrificially and unconditionally reveals that we truly belong to Jesus and have experienced the new life brought to us through His sacrifice on our behalf. You see, we then become the light of truth shining out as bright stars into the darkness of this world and those around us will see the difference God’s grace makes in a life that being transformed by the gospel. The Apostle Paul tells us:

*“Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain” (Philippians 2:14-16 ESV).*

You see, genuine Christian love is a behavior by which we strive to love God through our obedience to His Word and then love others by striving to seek out their well-being. It affects our attitudes, our actions, our words, and our feelings as we interact every day and is characterized by all the “one another” passages in the Bible. Genuine Christian love is never focused inward on what we get out of ministry to others but is always about doing what’s best and needed for our brothers and sisters in Jesus. I’ve been told that in the early church some of the non-believers of that time didn’t understand Christianity, but they often said, “Oh how they love one another.” Listen, genuine Christian love will never fail to be noticed because as God has told us, “love never fails.” When we express such genuine love the world around us will notice and some will search out what has made us so loving, leading them to the cross where God’s love is fully expressed.

This past week I received a text from a church member who was so happy to be a part of the Highlands family. This person mentioned that “Highlands is filled with many faithful Christians too, so love really abounds.” As your pastor, I want to tell you to keep up the good work of loving on each other as you’re able during this continuing crisis. It’s not going to be easy to love each other personally as we’re still practicing social distancing. However, we can still find ways to love through a variety of means such as sending cards, making calls, using email, praying, many and other ways. All it takes is a special effort and a little ingenuity by which we can express love to each other.

***Pastor Mark***