



A Lenten Devotional on Love
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Introduction

I have a friend who reads a book every year on marriage, usually around his wedding anniversary. Isn't that a wonderful thing to do? His wife says that he's a much better husband when he's reading these books. He's more patient, more kind, and more expressive. Guess who now funds this annual one-person book club? *"Here, Honey, go buy a book! My treat!"*

It makes sense that my friend is more loving when he's reading a book on relationships. We all tend to become what we think about. Our thoughts become actions. Our actions become habits. Our habits become our way of life.

I hope these daily devotions have the same effect on you as those books on marriage have on my friend – not because of my words, but because of your own thoughts and reflections. I hope your experience with this devotional will remind you of some habits of the heart that can help you love even better those in your life.

As Christians we know we're called to love. The Apostle Paul said it's the greatest of all virtues. Jesus said the most important commandments were to love God and to love our neighbor. And those who believe that 'God is love' must strive to emulate that love, to embody that love, and bring that love into the world, however imperfectly we will do it. May this Lenten devotional help us in this high calling.

Pastor Rich Knight
Lent 2022

Repentance is more than Confession

Ash Wednesday, March 2, 2022

*Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.
Matthew 3:8*

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, a time when we devote ourselves to personal and spiritual growth. This year I'm suggesting we devote ourselves to love, to growing in how we express love to those around us. Repentance is hugely important when it comes to growth in any area of our lives. Repentance means "to turn around," "to change direction."

Sometimes we confuse repentance with confession. Marriage & Family Counselor Gary Chapman tells the story of a wife who said to him, "My husband and I have the same old arguments about the same old things. We've been married for thirty years, and I'm sick of his apologies. I don't want any more apologies. I want him to change!" Do you see the difference between confession and repentance? An apology is simply a confession, "I messed up and I'm sorry." Repentance is a pledge to do better and then making that happen – "I'm so sorry that my behavior is so frustrating, and I will do my utmost to change and grow so that it doesn't happen again" (by the way, isn't that a much better apology than, "Oops, I did it again. Sorry!").

Prayer: God of Love, help me make this Lent not simply about confessing my mistakes. Help me to grow and change so that I may be a more loving person to those in my life. This won't be easy, but growing in love is the path I want to be on. Amen.



When Relationships Go South

Thur. March 3, 2022

*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
Matthew 6:12*

Have you ever noticed that sometimes when relationships go south, so to speak, they really go south? Way down South. The Deep South. South America even. Mistrust takes over. Assuming the worst becomes habitual. The gulf widens at every turn. I remember a term from a graduate school class on marriage counseling. The term is, an "undifferentiated ego mess." I've long forgotten the official definition, but perhaps it's self-evident? The egos of two very decent people can merge into one ugly mess.

Our Christian faith can help us with these kinds of messes. So can Lent. For Lent is a season of soul-searching repentance, remembering that we are imperfect sinners in the hands of a gracious God. Repentance can help us focus on our share of the mess. Repentance can also help us rediscover the humanity of the person with whom we're out of sync.

Jesus did something divinely sneaky (Forgive me, Lord!) in the Lord's Prayer. Before he asked us to wrestle with our unforgiveness towards those who've wronged us, he first asked us to address our own need for forgiveness. *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.* We'd rather do it in reverse order. Start with the real problem, the other person, and then confess our occasional little sins. But that's not really repentance, is it? It's "the log and the speck" syndrome: "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" (Jesus in Matt. 7:3).

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you call me to deal with first things first. Give me a repentant heart that looks at my own failures and contributions to my messes. As much as I might want you to straighten out the other guy, straighten me out first. Amen.

*“We love because God first loved us.”
I John 4:19*

Years ago I listened to a marriage enrichment speaker give a presentation entitled, *“Women are Weird and Men are Very Strange.”* Some titles you just never forget. The speaker had one specific directive and challenge for husbands, and one specific directive and challenge for wives. At the end of his talk he asked this simple question, *“Who should go first with the challenges I gave you - the husband or the wife?”*

He paused for a while and then gave the answer. *“You know who needs to go first? . . . You do.”*

Why wait to admit your part in the mess? Why wait to apologize? Why wait to forgive? Why wait to extend some extra kindness? Love goes first.

Prayer: God, we love because you loved us first. Before we could do anything to earn your love, you loved us and love us still. Help me to love like you. Amen.

“Let love be your highest goal.” - I Corinthians 14:1

Worship fans the flames of love

Sat. March 5, 2022

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.
I John 4:7-8*

Tomorrow is Sunday, the Lord’s Day, a day of worship. In a devotional about love it’s worth noting that worship helps us love. True worship invigorates our love. Worship infuses our hearts with the love of God. It fans the flames of love because we’re coming before the Source of all love in the universe!

Years ago, a Scottish pastor was visiting the home of a parishioner who seldom attended church. As they sat before a nice warm fire, the man said, “I’ve been having a hard time getting to church, Pastor, and some days I even wonder what’s the point.”

They sat in silence for a while until the pastor got up and removed a log from the fire. He put it off by itself, and it wasn’t long before the fire within that log went out. The man then said, “I’ll see you this Sunday, Pastor.” He realized that he needed to be close to the flame of God in order to keep his flame burning brightly.

Thought: If God is love, the closer I get to God, the closer I am to love. And that can only help!

Prayer: God of all Love, keep me close to you. Infuse me with your Love . . . each and every day. Amen.



You get Sundays off in a Lenten devotional.

Lent is the 40 days leading up to Easter, not counting Sundays.

“With heart, soul, mind, and strength, let us worship God!”

A few days with I Corinthians 13

Retrievers are meant to Retrieve; Christians are meant to Love.

Mon. March 7, 2022

One of the best dogs I've ever had was a Golden Retriever named Nicholas. He was kind-hearted, eager to please, and actually listened when he was told to do something. There was only one thing he wouldn't do. He wouldn't retrieve. I'd throw a tennis ball, and he would just look at me as if he were saying, "Now, why did you do that?" I'd say, "Nicholas, you're a Retriever! You're born and bred to retrieve. So, please do what you're meant to do!"

I wonder if God ever looks at us and wants to say something similar? Christians are meant to love. We're born of God and given the gift of the Holy Spirit within us, so that we might love as we have been loved. The scriptures are clear about this:

"The greatest of these is love." - I Cor. 13:13

"By this will all people know that you are my disciples, that you love one another." - John 13:35

"Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." - I John 4:8

Prayer: God of Love, fill me with your Spirit that I may overflow with your love. Amen.



A Carwash like None Other

Tues. March 8, 2022

Love is Patient. – I Corinthians 13:4

It was an experience I'll never forget and hope never to repeat.

I'll bet we've all heard these words, "Please put your car in neutral." They say it whenever you're about to go through an automatic car wash. I've heard it every time, a million times, except for the one time I didn't hear it. Suddenly the car took off straight into the jungle. Water started shooting out from everywhere. Big brushes attacked the sides of the car, and I thought that large blower at the end was going to kill me. But it was all over very quickly! My car was sudsy, but not clean. Still I couldn't bring myself to go back and face the attendant again, so I just drove away.

As strange and scary as that experience was, it did give me an image for impatience. Impatience is like going through the car wash with your car still in drive. It's rushing the process. It's trying to speed up something that shouldn't be sped up. So the next time you're becoming impatient with someone and tempted to finish their sentences and hurry them along, just remember the words I missed, "Please put it in neutral."

Prayer: God, you are love, and so you are patient with me. Help me express my love for others by being patient with them. Amen.

Keepin' It Real

Wed. March 9, 2022

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. I Cor. 13:4-7

Here's an exercise that helps bring this passage home to our individual lives and makes it very personal. The exercise is this: insert your name in the verses above wherever you see the word "love." So, if I do it,

it comes out like this: “*Rich is patient; Rich is kind; Rich is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude . . .*” You get the idea. It’s a pretty good way to see how we’re doing. And if you’re like me, it may lead you to some soul-searching and prayers of confession, both of which are pretty good things to do.

Prayer: God of Love, I fall short so many times. But rather than beat myself up for this, please build me up in love. Remind me of these virtues in the exact moments when I need to practice them. Amen.



Holding On & Letting Go

Thur. March 10, 2022

It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful . . . It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
I Corinthians 13:5, 7

Part of the mystery and practical challenge of love is that it involves two opposite habits of the heart: holding on and letting go. To truly love another person we have to do both, hold on and let go.

Love does not insist on its own way. That’s the letting go part. Love lets go of the desire to control, change, or fix another human being, but instead accepts them just as they are, faults and all. We can’t love someone and try to control them at the same time. That’s not love. There’s freedom in love.

And yet . . . *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* That’s the holding on part. Love stays connected. Love is tenacious when it has to be. Love perseveres.

Love is a lot like holding a precious little bird in your hand. Squeeze too tightly, and you’ll harm the bird. Hold it too loosely, and the bird will fly away.

Prayer: God, teach me the balance of holding on and letting go. Amen.

Fake It ‘Til You Make It

Fri. March 11, 2022

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8

A few weeks ago, there was Tik Tok video that went viral. It was a wife making her husband his favorite dinner. While making it she shared that they had just had a huge fight. She said, “He’s my best friend, and I can’t believe I can be so mean to him while we’re fighting, and I can barely remember what we were fighting about. So I’m making him his favorite meal to let him know I really love him.” It was a beautiful example of letting one’s convictions and what one knows to be true overcoming the strong emotions of a bad fight. It’s also an example of, “Fake it ‘til you make it.” Do loving things toward another and the loving feelings are likely to follow. In the great love chapter, the Apostle Paul doesn’t tell the Corinthians to have loving feelings toward each other. He tells them to be patient, kind, forgiving, not jealous or rude, etc. In other words, act loving towards one another and the feelings will follow. Think about it.

Prayer: God of Love, I know that love is more than what I feel. It’s shown by what I do. So, when my loving feelings wane, keep me on the path of love until they return. Amen.

*“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’”
Psalm 122:1*

Rabbi Harold Kushner tells the story of a tailor who visited his rabbi with a question about prayer.

“It’s like this, Rabbi. If someone approaches me and says, ‘Mendel, you’re a wonderful tailor,’ that makes me feel great. I feel appreciated. I can feel good all week long on the strength of a compliment like that. But if many people were to come, day after day, hour after hour, and they all kept saying, ‘Mendel, you’re a wonderful tailor,’ it would drive me crazy. I would soon get sick and tired of hearing it, and I would want them to get lost and leave me alone.

“So... this is my problem with prayer. It seems to me if we told God how wonderful he is once a week or so, and only one or two of us at a time, that would be all he would need or want. Should we imagine that God is so needy and insecure that he needs all of us praising him every day, three times a day, morning, noon, and night? And if not, then why aren’t we driving him crazy?”

The rabbi smiled and said, “Mendel, you are totally right. You have no idea how difficult it is for God to listen to all of our praises, hour after hour, day after day. But God understands how profoundly we need to utter that praise; so in his great love for us, he puts up with all of our prayers.”

God “puts up” with all our prayers and all our praise because the Lord knows we need it. Worship, prayer, and praise recharge our spiritual batteries, because worship opens us up to the Living God! Worship opens us up to life, to community, to grace, to joy, to goodness, and most of all to the God of Love! If we were to have a “love battery” within us, true worship would be the charging station!

Prayer: Lord, teach me to worship as you teach me to love. Amen.

Sunday is a good day to catch up if you’ve missed any readings.

A refresher course on communication

K.I.S.S.

Mon. March 14, 2022

*“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
Jesus in Matt. 28:20*

I was in seminary when my mother died. It was a wonderful place to go through such a personal and challenging loss. After all, there were several hundred students eager to practice their pastoral care skills, “How are you, Rich? How are you really?” In addition, there were professors (all trained as pastors) and a chaplain to talk with at any time. But surprisingly, one of the most supportive individuals for me during this time was the custodian of our dorm, Don King of Trenton NJ. Don didn’t have any of the training that we were getting in seminary. I also don’t think he ever attended any training sessions on how to be a caregiver. But Don always had time to talk and listen, and he always ended every talk with these words, “Rich, just remember, I’m in your corner.”

Simple words but spoken with conviction and love. It would be hard for me to describe how much Don’s care meant to me and how that one sentence gave me strength. Years later I would go through another life-crisis, going through a divorce as the pastor of a large church in a small town. One of our deacons kept saying to me, “Keep the faith, Pastor Rich. Keep the faith.” I don’t know if he meant keep my faith in God, in myself, in my calling, or in the church’s love. He probably meant all of the above.

K.I.S.S. Keep It Simple, Silly. Our words don't have to be poetic and eloquent to express loving care. Sometimes the simplest words are the best.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your words were often simple and direct, such as, *"I am with you always."* Teach me to use my words just as simply and wisely as you. Amen.



What's On Your Banner?

Tues. March 15, 2022

Then the LORD answered me and said:

Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.

Habakkuk 2:2

Here's a technique for having better conversations and getting to the heart of the matter. It's called the *"Banner Technique."* It's especially helpful if you've been going round and round on an issue and feel like you're making little to no progress. The idea is this: picture yourself making a poster or a banner that expresses your bottom line, what you're truly lobbying for in the conversation. Say it succinctly, maybe even with a slogan.

"More Help Around the House Please!" *"We Need a Date Night!"*

"I Need to Know You Care!" *"Just Listen, Please!"*

Another suggestion is to try and picture what's on the other's person's banner. "What I think I hear you saying is, 'We need to lighten our schedule a bit and have more down time.'" Or, if you're not sure, ask them what might be on their banner. "Tell me your bottom line. What am I not seeing?"

Prayer: O God our Creator, you gave us words, voices, emotions, logic, intuition and more, and still it's hard to communicate sometimes. Help me to speak in ways that are clear and to listen with my ears and my heart. Amen.

"Well, everybody knows the intelligent way to handle this!"

Wed. March 16, 2022

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. - Galatians 6:1

Years ago I used to work with a guy whose favorite words were logical, intelligent, and obvious. Now these are not bad words per se. Obviously! But when they're used a certain way, they can be rather annoying, and more importantly, they can hinder good communication. For instance, my co-worker/friend and I had many conversations that went like this: *"Rich, obviously the intelligent way to handle this is . . ."*

I often wanted to reply, *"Well, let me then share the unintelligent, irrational way to look at this."* Truth be told, I sometimes did use that response, and my friend was not amused.

It's best not to use "One Up" language (as any intelligent person knows!). It's best to speak to another as if we're on a level playing field. It not only facilitates better discussions and brainstorming, it's also the loving, respectful thing to do. Just ask any bright, logical person who understands the obvious.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to use my words respectfully, especially when I'm pretty sure I'm right. Help me to allow others to have their own opinions, beliefs, and convictions, that we may seek truth together. Amen.

“Copy That”

Thur. March 17, 2022

*Make your ear attentive to wisdom and incline your heart to understanding.
Proverbs 2:2*

There are some conversations you just never forget, such as this one that happened over 30 years ago.

We were standing outside the men’s room at the church I was serving, listening to the church custodian tell me why the urinal in the men’s bathroom needed to be replaced (Note: this is the only devotion in this collection that mentions a urinal). The custodian went on and on telling me what was wrong with the old one and what kind of urinal the church needed to purchase to replace it. I had taken a lot of courses in college and seminary, but none of them prepared me for this conversation. There was another person standing nearby who was taking in the riveting dialogue. Afterward I said to this person, “Did you hear how often he repeated himself? He just kept saying the same thing over and over again.” To which the person responded, “That’s because you didn’t say anything, Rich. He had no idea if you were hearing him and understanding the points he was making.” Oh. Copy that.

When someone repeats themselves and/or starts speaking more loudly it’s usually because they’re not sure they’re being heard. I needed to say something like, “I hear what you’re saying,” or even better would have been a specific summary, like, “So you’re saying we need to buy the Binford 5000 Urinal to replace the old one, correct?” It’s so easy, but it never occurred to me.

So the moral of the story is, give others clear clues that you’ve heard them and are understanding what they’re saying. Trust me, it’ll cut down on the time you spend talking about urinals outside of men’s rooms.

Prayer: Teach me to be a good listener and to communicate effectively to others that I’m listening. Amen.



“Don’t Fight!”

Fri. March 18, 2022

“Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome spouse.” - Proverbs 21:9

“Better to live in the desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered spouse.” - Proverbs 21:19

The Book of Proverbs is an earthy collection of everyday wisdom. The writers of the Proverbs highly valued healthy, effective communication. They also saw the harm that’s inflicted with poor and mean-spirited fighting. *Proverbs 15:17* – “*Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred*” (the writer was obviously not a vegetarian).

Some marriage experts put it this simply: “*Don’t fight!*” Negotiate, bargain, compromise, listen attentively, affirm common ground, agree to disagree, and so on. The point is, do whatever you can to avoid unhealthy fighting. This is sound advice for inside our homes and outside our homes with our friends, co-workers, parishioners, and more. As Harriet Lerner writes: “It takes only one person to end a fight or refuse to participate in it.”

At the same time, we don’t want to sweep conflict under the rug. So my favorite concept is “Up to the Line without going Over the Line.” The Line is clear, honest, open, respectful communication. It can involve strong emotions, even anger, but it doesn’t go over the line. Over the line involves such non-pleasantries as personal attacks, yelling & screaming, insults, and much more. Some folks have trouble coming up to the line. Others have trouble with going over the line. The goal is to get up to that line and stay there!

Prayer: God of Love, help me to speak the truth as I see it with clarity, respect, and love. Amen.

“I don’t need advice right now!”

Sat. March 19, 2022

*“Rejoice with those who rejoice; Weep with those who weep.”
Romans 12:15*

John Gray’s book Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus was quite popular in the 90’s, selling over 50 mil. copies. Some folks didn’t like it because of the sweeping generalizations. I found some of those generalizations quite helpful. Such as this one: in a man’s world (Mars), when a man goes to another man with a problem (a leaky faucet, a recommendation for a new lawn mower, etc.) he wants an answer. He wants suggestions and advice. Women on the other hand often tend to share more personal things with their friends, and instead of advice they’d like to receive empathy and understanding. This is why men give so much advice and why so many women find it so annoying!

The Apostle Paul said it so well, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; Weep with those who weep.”* It’s a call to empathy. Empathy requires listening with your heart and gently expressing what you hear.

Thought: Empathy is crucial for expressing care.

Prayer: God of love and compassion, help me to express empathy and understanding, without going first to advice. A-men!

Extra Credit: For a brief and very funny video on this topic, go to YouTube and search for, *“It’s Not About the Nail.”*



Sunday

“Remember the sabbath and keep it holy.”

Commandment #4

Sometimes a Book is More than a Book

Mon. March 21, 2022

“Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” - I John 3:18

It’s one of my least favorite books and one of my most beloved books. I don’t care for the author at all. The person is a verbal bomb-thrower, who loves to make bold statements about the Bible and Christianity as if they were stating facts. I disagree with the premise of this particular book and the conclusions put forth. But it’s also one of my most beloved books, because of when it was given to me.

It was years ago (at another church), and we’d had a very difficult meeting after church with the parents of the kids who went on the mission trip. The pastors were under attack from one family, all because we’d heard that there had been illegal drugs on the mission trip and we wanted to find out how, when, and where this had happened, so it wouldn’t happen again. This family thought we were targeting their child, and during the course of a six page carefully crafted speech we were accused of being on a witch hunt. The attacks were brutal and something neither one of us had faced before. I left church that day in shock, feeling as if I’d been punched in the gut.

I was home for about an hour and a half when there was a knock at the door. It was Tom, a parishioner and friend. He said, *“I came by to give you a hug, and I got you this book.”* I learned that day that even a questionable book given in love can work wonders for your soul! Hugs work great, too.

Prayer: God of Love, show me tangible ways that I can demonstrate my love for others. Amen.

The Two Sides of Love

Tues. March 22, 2022

The Lord disciplines those whom he loves - Hebrews 12:6

I once had a carful of kids coming home from a youth group event when I overheard a rather remarkable statement. One of the girls was telling the group that she was currently grounded (except for youth group events!) because of her recent poor grade in math. One of her closest friends got the same low grade. And then she said, *“Her parents don’t even love her. She didn’t get grounded at all!”* I almost asked her to repeat what she said. I’d never heard a teenager equate a punishment with love, but of course that’s exactly what it was!

Much of the time love is soft and gentle, but sometimes love needs to be a bit tough. Natural consequences. Rules and limits. Curfews and truth-telling. An end to enabling. It’s all the harder side of love, harder to give and receive it, but often necessary. Think about it.

Prayer: Give me the wisdom to know when love must be a bit tough. And give me the courage to follow through. Amen.



Values are Caught, not Taught

Wed. March 23, 2022

Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. - Philippians 4:9

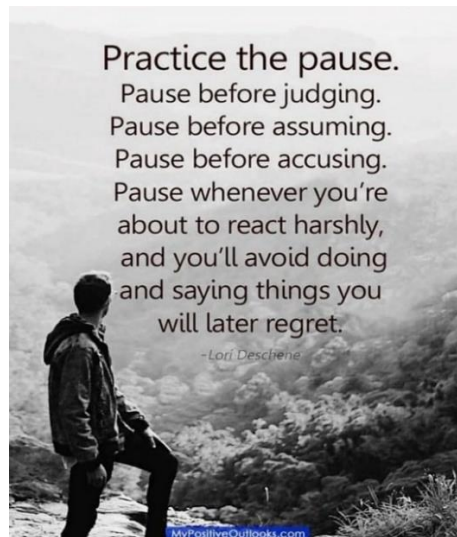
Our family has gone camping in Acadia for years. I think my sons have gone there every year of their lives. Family time camping is the best. I’ve always worked hard to make things as special as I could on these trips, especially when my sons were little and then when Alisa & Maddie joined the adventures. I usually prepared a CD of our favorite songs to listen to during the long drive, and I always made sure I had some of their favorite snacks and drinks on hand. One thing I’ve always loved to do is have a cooler in the car filled with ice cold drinks for when we finish up a hard hike. There’s nothing better than Poland Spring Water or our beloved Old Soaker Blueberry Soda after a challenging climb.

I mention these things because of something that happened on our trip out West last summer. Sam and I had gone off to tackle one of the most difficult hikes in the country, Angel’s Landing in Zion National Park. When we returned to the lodge my son Ben had ice cold Huckleberry Soda waiting for us. I cried, and I’m crying now writing this. It was so thoughtful, and I knew where he’d gotten the idea. A few days earlier something similar happened in the Grand Tetons. We were coming up on the Mormon barn that’s featured in a Steven Curtis Chapman music video that we’d all watched years ago. That video inspired our trip. As we drove up to see the barn in person, my son Sam had connected his phone to the car radio, and he played the song from the video, “The Great Adventure.” I cried and cried, and I’m crying now writing this, because I know where he first got the idea.

As parents, grandparents, aunts & uncles, neighbors & teachers, we don’t always get to see the results of what we’re trying to teach our young people. But they’re always watching, learning, and observing. It’s all part of the Great Adventure.

Prayer: Remind me, God, that children are learning from my example, for better or for worse. Help me make it for the better. Amen.

“Be quick to listen and slow to speak.” - James 1:19



Try the power of the pause today.

Prayer: God, you know that I sometimes engage my mouth without consulting my brain. Teach me the power of the pause. Amen.

“Who’s a Good Boy?”

Fri. March 25, 2022

But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. - Ruth 1:16

Frankie and I have a complicated relationship. He’s extremely cute but not extremely bright. He’s very loving, but he only listens when he feels like it. Frankie’s our dog, half Bassett Hound, half Pit Bull, and often 100% frustrating. He and I have had more than our share of, *“Could you be any more stubborn, Frankie!!!”* That’s why what he did the other day touched me so much.

I was less than a week into my recovery from shoulder surgery. One of the most painful parts was getting all settled into the recliner to rest, especially since the controls were on the wrong side for me. Alisa was at work. Maddie was at school. So I set the recliner to the exact position I wanted and then struggled to sit back into it, and then get ice packs in place, one for my shoulder and one for my lower back. I then covered myself with blankets, and then tried to get my sleep apnea mask onto my face with one hand. During each of these movements I let out various noises, all signs that I was in pain. Frankie was on the bed next to the recliner. He repositioned himself to be closer to me and so that he could see me straight on. And there he sat, watching me. I closed my eyes to rest for a few minutes, and when I opened them, he was still watching me. I rested some more but then needed to adjust one of the ice packs. Frankie hadn’t moved and had not changed his focus one bit. This went on for at least 30 minutes until I eventually fell asleep. I almost get choked up writing this, because I’m sure that Frankie senses our “complicated” relationship, and surely he remembers how many times I’ve gotten frustrated with him. But his focus never changed.

It’s a wonderful gift to give someone your full attention, to say to them through your focus, *“you are the only thing that matters to me right now.”* Try giving that gift to someone today. If Frankie can do it, we can, too.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to give the gift of focused, loving attention. Amen.

“God Dwells Among Us When We Love”

Sat. March 26, 2022

“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”

1 John 4:16

In I John 4, the Apostle John expresses one of the most beautiful truths in Christianity: when we love we are abiding in God’s love. We are living in God’s love. We are swimming in the current of God’s love. Below is one of my favorite stories to illustrate this truth. It’s from the Talmud, an ancient collection of writings that add commentary and insights to biblical stories. Here’s the story:

Long, long ago in the land of Israel, there were two brothers who inherited their father’s farm, along with the mill that was part of the farm. The brothers worked each day in the fields and in the mill, and at the end of day they divided equally between them the grain they had ground in the mill. Now, the one brother was married and had a large family. The other brother was single and lived alone. Each night the single brother would sit in his home and say to himself, *“You know, it’s not fair that we divided the grain equally. My brother has many mouths to feed, and I have just myself.”* So each night the single brother went out to his barn and filled a sack with grain and snuck it over to his married brother’s barn.

Well, each night the married brother would sit in his house and say to himself, *“You know, it’s not fair that we divide the grain equally, because I have many children to care for me when I am old, and my brother has none.”* So each night the married brother would go out to his barn and fill a sack with grain and sneak it over to his single brother’s barn. And it was a mystery to them how their piles were replenished during the night. Until one night the mystery was cleared up when they left their barns at the same time and met in the field between their farms. They immediately put down their sacks of grain and embraced, because they knew how much they were loved. It’s said that God looked down from heaven at the exact moment when those two brothers embraced. And God said, *“This is holy ground, for here I have witnessed incredible love. It is here that I wish to dwell.”* And it’s said that the great temple in Jerusalem was built on the very spot where those two brothers embraced, for God dwells among us when we love. When we give ourselves to others in love, God is living and loving through us.

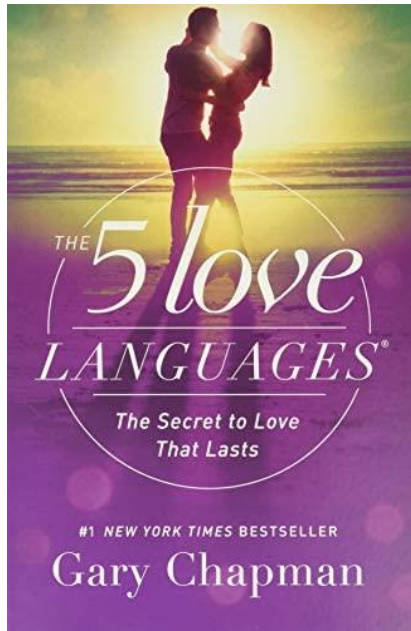
Prayer: God of Love, live through me. Love through me. Abide in and through me. Amen.



Sunday Worship unites us with the God of Love.

William Sloan Coffin said, “Faith is being grasped by the power of love”

Allow yourself to be grasped by God’s love for you this day!



Dr. Gary Chapman's
The Five Languages of Love

Love Languages

Mon. March 28, 2022

*“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
Jesus in John 13:35*

Christian psychologist Gary Chapman has identified five different ways of expressing love, what he calls five “love languages.”

1. Words of Affirmation

Compliments Encouraging Words Appreciation Affirming your love

2. Gifts

Thoughtful, Personal Gifts The Gift of Self (especially in a crisis)

3. Acts of Service

Practical, thoughtful deeds done for the other

4. Quality Time

Togetherness Quality Conversation Focused Attention Activities

5. Physical Touch

Tenderness Hugs Caressing Physical Intimacy

Please review the list again and think about which one(s) might be your favorite love language(s). Which ones make you feel most loved, and which areas produce the greatest disappointment within you when your expectations aren't met? Then think about those closest to you and what their love language might be. When do they feel most loved and most disappointed?

Prayer: Help me to be more effective in my love of others by being mindful of their love language. And help me see when others are loving me, whether they're speaking my language or not. Amen.

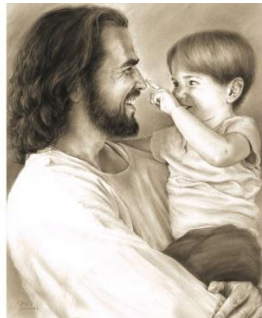
*“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you.”
Jesus in Matt. 7:12*

A friend of mine had an interesting miscommunication with his wife, and it relates to Love Languages. My friend had a weekend where there wasn't much on his or the family's calendar, so he decided to devote the entire weekend to his wife. He did so by doing every project around the house that he could think of that would make her life easier. He did things like build more shelves in the pantry, he cleaned the closet by the front door and added more hooks for jackets. He vacuumed and Armor All-ed her car and even took it through the car wash. He said it was so much fun doing all these projects and thinking about how much his wife would appreciate them. But a funny thing happened at dinner on Sunday night. His wife said, *“You know, I feel like you haven't really been present this weekend. We haven't connected at all. It's like you're not even thinking about me.”* You can imagine my friend's reply: *“What??? I've done nothing this whole weekend but think of you! Look at all I've done!”*

It all comes down to Love Languages. My friend's love language is Acts of Service. His wife's Love Language is Quality Time. Oops. Swing and a miss!

When we're really trying to love someone and still missing the mark, sometimes it's because we're loving them out of our Love Language and not theirs. Sometimes we have to slightly alter the Golden Rule so that it says, *“Do unto others as they would like it done unto them.”* Think about it.

Prayer: When expressing my love, help me God to speak the right language. Amen.



Jesus & Love Languages

Wed. March 30, 2022

Not surprisingly, Jesus who was divine love incarnated, demonstrated his love using all five Love Languages.

Words – *“As the Father has love me, so I have loved you.”* - John 15:9

Gifts – *“The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* - Rom. 6:23

Acts of Service – *“For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.”* - Matt. 20:28,
“By this we know what love is: Jesus laid down his life for us.” – I John 3:16

Quality Time – *“Mary sat the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying . . . Martha, Martha, you are worried about so many things . . . Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”* - Luke 10:39, 41-42

Touch – *“And he took the children in his arms and blessed them.”* – Mark 10:16, *“Jesus he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them”* – Luke 4:40

Thought: Jesus utilized all five Love Languages, and so must we.

Prayer: Teach me the various ways that I can express my love for others. Amen.

“The Gift of Wise Persons”

Thur. March 31, 2022

“Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.” Romans 12:10

There’s a story you sometimes hear at Christmas time called, “*The Gift of the Magi*,” the gift of “wise persons.” One version of the O. Henry story goes like this: Once there was a young, newly-married couple coming up on their first Christmas together as husband & wife. They loved each other very, very much, and they wanted to get each other wonderful Christmas presents to express their deep love. But they were very poor.

One day they were walking through their village, and they looked in the window of a jewelry store. The wife saw a beautiful barrette, made of gold with oyster shells in it. She had long hair and as she looked into the window she said, “*That would look so nice in my hair, but I know we can’t afford it.*” Her husband looked into that same window and saw a gold chain that he needed for his grandfather’s pocket watch. But he too said, “*I know we can’t afford that either.*”

Well, Christmas morning came, and the husband got up first and went downstairs to stoke the fire in their apartment. Then his bride came down the stairs, still wearing her nightcap. They exchanged gifts. He gave her her gift, and much to her surprise it was that gold barrette they had seen in the jewelry store window. “*How could you afford this?*” she asked. “*Well,*” said her husband, “*remember my grandfather’s pocket watch that I told you about? I sold it to buy the barrette, because I wanted you to have just what you wanted.*” She gave him his gift, and much to his surprise it was a gold chain for his pocket watch. “*How could you afford this?*” the husband asked his wife. And she took off her nightcap, revealing that she had cut her hair and sold it to buy the watch.

Well, you might think they had a lousy Christmas, because he had no watch and she had very little hair! But you know what they did? They attached the barrette to the gold chain and made a beautiful necklace for her to wear. And they had the best Christmas ever, because they knew how much they were loved.

Prayer: Help me to show my love for others by putting them first. And thank you for those times when others do that for me. Amen.



Got Fruit?

Fri. April 1, 2022

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. – Galatians 5:22

On the surface of things this is a sweet, delightful passage. Afterall, who doesn’t like love, joy and peace? But there’s also a great truth that confronts us in this verse. The truth is this: If the “fruit” (think result or evidence) of God’s Spirit in my life is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,” then the more I have of those virtues, the more God’s Spirit is at work within me. And to the contrary, the less I exhibit those virtues, the less God’s Spirit is at work in my life. So the verse becomes for us a spiritual check-up, a diagnostic tool to evaluate how close we actually are to God. Certainly we all make mistakes and have bad days or even times in our lives where these fruits are hard to find. But ask yourself if the people around you would use the words of Galatians 5:22 to describe you. Even scarier, ask them directly.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Fill me with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I need more of You for these fruits to grow within me. Amen.

“Be slow to speak and quick to listen”

James 1:19

“The purposes of the human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out.”

Proverbs 20:5

Loving people are good listeners. I can't say it any better than the quotes below.

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”
– Stephen R. Covey

“When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.” - Ernest Hemingway

“Deep listening is the kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of another person. You can call it compassionate listening. You listen with only one purpose: to help him or her to empty his heart.”
– Tich Nhat Hanh

“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” – Simone Weil

“God gave us mouths that close and ears that don't, that must tell us something.” – Anonymous

“We have two ears and one mouth, and we should use them proportionally.” - Susan Cain

Prayer: Help me express my love and care for others by listening to them. Teach me to listen with my heart that I might see the world as it appears to them through their eyes. Amen.

Sunday

Keep on listening!

“Listening is one of the loudest forms of kindness.”

A few days with Dr. John Gottman

A Tale of Two Car Rides

Mon. April 4, 2022

“Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 1:2

Many years ago a couple took me to a Kenny Rogers concert (Yes, I know I'm cool.). The concert was great. The car ride was not. All the way to and from the concert the wife complained about her husband's driving and gave him numerous suggestions on how he should drive. “Get in that lane! Stop looking around! Keep your eyes on the road!” I considered getting out and hitch-hiking to the concert.

In contrast to that car ride, I remember another ride to an event where my friend's wife did all the driving. At first, I thought it was so my buddy and I could talk, but they freely shared that she does all the driving because she doesn't think he's a great driver, and they both got tired of fighting about it. So whenever they're in the car together, she drives.

Dr. John Gottman has an exercise he does with couples for his research. He brings in newlywed couples and asks them to discuss an unresolved issue between them. Then he brings them back in a year, two years, five years, ten years, and asks them to discuss that very same issue again. Gottman has found that

most of the issues that couples fight about (Gottman says his research shows that 69% of the issues) never completely go away, but in successful marriages the couples learn how to manage their differences, such as the couple in Ride #2.

Thought: When it comes to our loved ones and friends, maybe we should spend more time trying to figure out how to manage differences rather than trying to solve them and make them go away?

Prayer: God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

“We Need to Talk”

Tues. April 5, 2022

*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
Proverbs 15:1*

They’re some of the most dreaded words in the English language: We need to talk. Nothing good seldom follows. At work, at home, with a friend. It’s never, “*We need to talk. What can I get you for Christmas?*” or, “*Let’s plan an evening where we do whatever you want to do!*” No. “*We need to talk*” never goes like that.

There is one principle for having good talks that is simple and relatively easy. It’s this: avoid a harsh start-up. John Gottman is the country’s foremost researcher on marriage. He has been studying the topic for more than 35 years, and he’s paid careful attention to communication patterns between partners. And although it’s common sense, it’s still nice to have it confirmed by his research: 94% of the time the way a discussion starts determines the way it will end. If two people start the conversation with some gentleness and respect, they have more effective and satisfying talks. If they start with attacks and then defensiveness, there’s a good chance it won’t be a satisfying talk. The key is to start well. Avoid attacks by using “I” statements (“I feel ____ when you do ____.”), own your part of the problem, admit mistakes, look for common ground, and realize that the person before you is more important than the issue at hand.

If I may channel M.L. King, Jr. for minute: *I have a dream* that one day the world will learn to avoid harsh start-ups, and those words, “*We need to talk,*” won’t strike fear in us any longer!

Prayer: Lord, give me the wisdom and self-control that I need to use my words wisely. Amen.

Repair Attempts

Wed. April 6, 2022

*Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.
Ephesians 4:15*

Yesterday we talked about avoiding harsh start-ups. This principle applies to both parties in a conversation – the one who brought up the issue and the one who’s set to listen and respond. Both parties must try to avoid harshness and defensiveness in the early part of the conversation, because as we said yesterday, conversations generally end the way they start.

Researcher John Gottman has identified another key to effective communication among partners and loved ones. He calls them “*repair attempts.*” These are statements or actions designed to diffuse negativity and lower the emotional temperature. Thus, they are especially helpful when emotions are running high. Repair attempts can make a big difference when it comes to keeping a conversation from going off the tracks.

Here are some of the repair attempts that Gottman has identified: apologizing, taking responsibility for one's actions, humor, touch, words of affirmation, and "I" statements like, "I need to calm down," or "I'm starting to see the wisdom of what you're saying."

Gottman's years of research has confirmed that couples who use repairs attempts early and often handle conflict much more effectively. Every couple has their disagreements and fights. It's how we manage the disagreements that makes the difference.

Prayer: Loving God, help me keep potentially difficult talks on track. Teach me to speak the truth as I see it with love and respect. Amen.



The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Thur. April 7, 2022

*Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance.
Proverbs 1:5*

At the University of Seattle Professor John Gottman has created a laboratory to study marriage. He brings newlywed couples in for a weekend, and videotapes all of their interactions (up until about 9:00 pm), giving them various assignments and projects to work on. Gottman and his team then score and label every interaction. At the end of the weekend Gottman can predict with 93.6% accuracy whether the couple will divorce or not. He's identified four things that he calls, "*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*," four behaviors that lead to the demise of the marriage. We all make mistakes in our relationships, but it's couples that score high in all four that are at risk.

1. *Criticism* – personal attacks on the other's character or personality. Complaints are okay because they focus on the behavior ("It bothers me when . . ."). Criticism is focused on the person (You're such a . . ."). Argue the point, not the person.
2. *Contempt* – can be displayed with simply a roll of the eyes (which communicates, "I can't believe I have to put up with you!"). Other forms include name calling, mockery, hostile humor, and sarcasm.
3. *Defensiveness* – a way of blaming the other for the problem ("You clearly misunderstood me. The problem is not me, it's you and your misguided understanding!"). Includes counterattacks.
4. *Stonewalling* – the couple is avoiding the issues, tuning each other out, and starting to give up.

These principles apply not just to marriage, but to all sorts of relationships. Keep them in mind this week as you interact with those around you.

Prayer: God of Love, teach me the habits that deepen love. Amen.

The Importance of a 5:1 Ratio

Fri. April 8, 2022

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. - Philippians 4:8

I've mentioned John Gottman's lab for studying committed relationships and trying to predict divorce (in order to prevent it though his findings). One of the things that Gottman looks for in couples is a 5:1 ratio of positive interactions over negative interactions. Couples that have a 5:1 ratio tend to have very satisfying, enduring relationships.

Consider this example. Imagine that I walk into the church office and give Linn a compliment for some work she has done. And then the next time I go in, I speak a critical word to her and point out a mistake (which she seldom makes!). And then I go back in some time later with a compliment, and then later a criticism, then another compliment, and another criticism . . . You get the idea. It's a 1:1 ratio of positive and negative interactions. Would Linn think that I was pleased with her if it's a 1:1 ratio? I doubt it!

Sometimes we have "selective attention" when it comes to those we're close to. We can focus too much on what we view as negatives, weaknesses or areas that we feel need improvement. Instead, we do well to do exactly the opposite – focus on strengths, kindnesses shown, and more, as Paul spoke to the Philippians in the passage above. Please read it again, and let's try to practice the 5:1 ratio this week. (And if that seems too hard, try at least a 2:1 ratio!)

Prayer: God of Grace, if I'm going to be selective in what I focus on, help it to be what is positive and worthy of praise. Amen.



Love and Sacrifice

Sat. April 9, 2022

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. - 1 Peter 2:21

A number of years ago there was a song on the radio with this line in it: "If it don't come easy, you gotta let it go." I used to hear that and think to myself, You've got to be kidding me! Love, like all of life, is not always easy. It requires hard work and sacrifices. It requires battling our self-centeredness. It involves the hard work of admitting our mistakes, try to change old habits, and learning new ways of living and loving.

Tomorrow is Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week. It's a week that shows us love in action. Jesus went through so much so that we might know how much we are loved. If he lived by that silly song on the radio he never would have ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey. He would have stayed outside the city and played cards with his friends. Now that's easy.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have shown us what love looks like. Help me follow in your footsteps, even when the going gets tough. Amen.



The Most Courageous Ride Ever Taken

Palm Sunday, April 10, 2022

Jesus resolutely set his face to Jerusalem. - Luke 9:51

In the ninth chapter of Luke's Gospel the focus of Jesus' life and ministry turns towards Jerusalem. Everywhere he heads from then on is in the direction of Jerusalem. He arrives of course on Palm Sunday and makes his messianic entrance into that ancient city. It had to be a day filled with mixed emotions for him, with the praise of the crowds on one hand and the opposition poised and ready to destroy him on the other hand. But ride on he did. It was the most courageous ride ever taken.

We all have our Jerusalem's, things we'd rather not face, situations we'd like to avoid, conversations we'd rather not have, apologies we'd rather not give, and faults we'd rather not admit. To be a follower of Jesus means that we sometimes have to willingly ride into difficult situations. Being a loving person requires that same resolute focus and courage.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your courage gives me courage to face what I'd rather not face, to go where I'd rather not go, knowing that you ride on before me. Thank you. Amen.

Good & Angry

Mon. April 11, 2022

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. - Matthew 21:12

Jesus got angry. Really angry. On Palm Sunday he overturned the tables of the money changers, for they were charging exorbitant fees to exchange foreign currency for special temple coins. He then drove out those who were selling cattle, sheep, and doves used for temple sacrifices, often charging 10 times more than market value. People being taken advantage of in the Temple made him furious.

It's normal and healthy to get angry when we see injustice. It's also normal to get angry when we feel we've been wronged or repeatedly taken advantage of or ignored. The Bible never condemns anger. It simply says this: *Be angry but do not sin (Ephesians 4:26)*.

What's your comfort level with anger? In some households anger is quite common and acceptable, "It's just how we talk." In other households it's exactly the opposite, and so when it occurs it's a big deal, "I can't believe you're talking to me that way!" Sometimes simply naming the emotion can help diffuse it, "I'm feeling angry, and I'd really like to discuss this issue in a very constructive way. So, please give me a few minutes." That's a pretty good way to manage a very human emotion.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to get angry at the things that anger you, and to feel joy at the things that bring you joy. Amen.

On Loving Yourself

Tues. April 12, 2022

*“Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”
Jesus during Holy Week, Matthew 22:39*

In order to love others, we have to love ourselves first, because love is giving of oneself. Isn't that what Jesus is saying? William Sloan Coffin once wrote, *“If we hate ourselves, we can never love others, for love is the gift of oneself. How will you make a gift of that which you hate?”*

If you're having one of those days/weeks/months/years where you're having trouble loving yourself, please consider this: God loves you. You are God's beloved child. Please don't hate what God loves. Cherish what God loves. Cherish who God loves . . . You!

Listen again to William Sloan Coffin: *“Of God's love we can say two things: it is poured out universally for everyone from the Pope to the loneliest wino on the planet; and secondly, God's love doesn't seek value, it creates value. It is not because we have value that we are loved, but because we are loved that we have value. Our value is a gift, not an achievement.”*

Prayer: God of Love, help me to truly love myself, so I can better love others. Amen.



Grace and Forgiveness

Wed. April 13, 2022

*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
Matthew 6:12*

Don Henley said it so well in the song, *“The Heart of the Matter.”* *“How can love survive in such a graceless age?”* It can't. We're imperfect people. We let each other down. We leave undone things we ought to have done; and we sometimes do things which we ought not to have done, as the old prayer of confession says. Our shortcomings cause hurt and often distance in our relationships. That's where grace and forgiveness come in. Grace is allowing another person to be human. It's "giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me." It's not excusing a behavior or saying it was okay. It's usually saying, that wasn't okay, but we're okay. Grace and forgiveness build a bridge when our flaws have created a chasm. It's a bridge we need to build with those we love, because just as we need to extend grace and forgiveness, we're also going to need to receive it ourselves when our flaws have created another chasm. Intimate relationships require large and regular doses of forgiveness.

Prayer: God of Grace, you are the Great Forgiver. As your grace washes over me and cleanses me of my sins, help me to extend that same grace and forgiveness to those I love. Teach me to forgive, for you have forgiven me. Amen.



Family Traditions

Maundy Thursday, April 14, 2022

"I have eagerly desired to share this Passover meal with you."

Jesus in Luke 22:15

I once heard that one of the keys to having a happy, healthy family is having family traditions. It might be a yearly camping trip, a special way of celebrating birthdays, certainly holiday dinners, or even just an activity that the family enjoys doing together, such as hiking, playing a certain board game, or playing a sport together. Traditions connect us to each other while we're doing them, but also across time.

"Remember that time . . ."

I've always loved these words of Jesus spoken at the Last Supper, *"I have eagerly desired to share this Passover meal with you."* The Feast of Passover connected and still connects Jews to their ancient history of being rescued by God from slavery in Egypt. In addition, there's the personal, emotional, and spiritual connection of sharing the meal around the table, year after year. Christians have this same connection as we gather around the Lord's Table for Holy Communion. Jesus gave us this meal the night of the Last Supper, as he shared a Passover meal with his disciples. He gave the bread and the wine new meaning on the eve of Good Friday. In the Christian faith it's our most special family tradition.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, on this Maundy Thursday I thank you for the sacrament of Holy Communion, for it reminds me of the privilege and joy of being part of your family. Amen.

When It's Hard to Love

Good Friday, April 15, 2022

Jesus said to his mother, "Dear Woman, here is your son."

Then he said to John, "Here is your mother." - John 19:26-27

I'll bet you're like me when it comes to love. I can be loving pretty easily when I'm well rested, when I've gotten a good night's sleep, when I'm having a really good day, when I'm not stressed, when I'm healthy and free from pain, and when I'm feeling good about myself. But take away any one of those things and it's much more challenging to be loving.

In the passage above, Jesus is hanging on the cross. Imagine the pain he is in. Then he sees someone who is also in excruciating pain, his mother Mary. She's standing next to the disciple Jesus was closest to, John. With the words above he is asking John to take care of his mother. If that's not a picture of loving when it's hard to love, I don't know what is.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the strength to love, especially in those moments when it's hardest to do so. You have shown me the way. Amen.

“You look like a nice family.”

Holy Saturday, April 16, 2022

“Blessed are the merciful.” - Matthew 5:7

It was my first Easter as a single dad. My sons got dropped off at church between the 2nd and 3rd services that day, and they made it through the service without causing each other bodily harm. We went back to my little townhouse for a snack and a nap and then headed out mid-afternoon for Easter dinner at the Bugaboo Creek Steakhouse (it’s a fun place, and I can’t cook). I was still exhausted from Holy Week and three services that morning, but Bugaboo had a talking buffalo, a talking pine tree, pop-up beavers, and wiggly fish. So the boys were quite entertained. Following our meal an amazing thing happened. The waitress came up to us and said, “One of our customers today is paying for your meal. He’s gone now, but he said you looked like a nice family, and he wanted to treat you all today.” I instantly broke out in tears, which I’m sure confused Ben and Sam. We looked like a nice family? In actuality, we looked like what we were – a newly divorced, stressed-out, and fatigued dad who can’t cook, taking his sons out for Easter dinner. It was a gift of mercy and grace.

Here’s a thought. We often strive to give people what they deserve. One good turn deserves another. Sometimes love means giving people more than they deserve.

Prayer: Loving, gracious God, your grace and mercy mean that you shower us with more love than we could ever earn. Teach us to love like you love. Amen.



Newness of Life

Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. - Romans 6:4

According to the Apostle Paul in the passage above, Easter gives us the power to grow, to change, to be made new. Elsewhere he says, “*The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you*” (Romans 8:11). The new life of Easter Sunday is available to us! We don’t have to strive to be more loving all on our own power. The God of Love, the God of Resurrection gives us divine energy, motivation, and wisdom to grow and walk in newness of life!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the promise of new life that Easter brings. Infuse me with the spirit and power of the Risen Christ that I may walk in newness of life. Amen!

Have a Blessed and Beautiful Easter!

Pastor Rich