



At Home Worship for Faith and Hope

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

February 14, 2021

* Call to Worship

~ written by Katherine Hawker

*Jesus offers a new-old commandment,
that we should love each other.*

*With the incredible power
and the unfathomable depth
of God's love for us
we can, we must
love one another.*

*And it is in this
our love for one another
that the world will know
whom and what we worship.*

*Come, children of God,
let us love one another.*

*Song of Praise

"Lift High the Cross"

UMH 159

Either Sing/Read the Song Below or Listen to a Worship Song

Opening Prayer

Loving, living God, be among us now. Show us your ways. Guide our steps. Live in us, that we may be people of steadfast hope and powerful giving. Help us hear your words, challenging us to give you all the things that are yours. Help us remember that all we are and all we have are gifts from you, gifts to be shared in service and love. Holy One among us, help us be a holy people who receive your word with joy and live your message with love. Amen.

NO Children's Moments This Week

Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of gratitude with grit! Lift up with thanksgiving to God for the ways He has helped you through these difficult days.

Sing the Doxology Together

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayers of Loving As You Loved Us

— written by John van de Laar

*How deeply you have loved us, Jesus;
how willingly you stepped into our experience,
how completely you empathized with all that we endure.*

Teach us to love as you have loved us.

*How sacrificially you have loved us, Jesus;
how completely you gave yourself for us,
how courageously you suffered for our sakes.*

Teach us to love as you have loved us.

*How restoratively you have loved us, Jesus;
how generously you share your life,
how extravagantly you make yourself available to us.*

Teach us to love as you have loved us.

***We praise you for your love
which is given so freely and so unconditionally.***

***And we thank you for believing
that we could learn to offer such love
to each other. Amen.***

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

God's Word

I John 4:7-19 (NLT)

The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!

Finishing Our Series on "Paradoxes"

Message

"The Paradox of Real Love"

Pastor Clark

...see below or go to website to listen online

* Hymn of Faith

"The Gift of Love"

UMH 408

Blessing

*Go now, and love one another,
because love is from God.
Proclaim God's salvation to every generation.
Remain in Jesus Christ,
and like branches of a vine, draw your life from him.
And may God the vine grower tend you and make you fruitful;
May Christ Jesus abide in you and give you life;
And may the Holy Spirit cast out all fear and fill you with God's love.
We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
...In the name of Christ. Amen.*

The Paradox of Real Love...how the Transfiguration is a window into what real love looks like

1 John 4:7-19 (NLT)

Introduction

"It's simply not natural for us. It's natural to make sure all your needs are met. It's natural to hoard what you have in fear that at some point you won't have enough. (Remember the toilet paper shortage during the Coronavirus Shutdown?) It's natural to carry around with you a long catalog of things you want for yourself. It's natural to be more in tune with your feelings than with the feelings of others. It's natural to want mercy for yourself but justice for others. It's natural to be very aware of the sin of others, yet blind to your own. If we are ever going to be people of mercy, we need bountiful mercy for ourselves, because what stands in the way of our being a community of mercy is us!" Paul David Tripp, **New Morning Mercies**, January 26

Apart from God's grace and mercy, it's natural for us to be selfish, self-absorbed, and self-dependent. That's why I am placing this in our Paradoxes Series...at the end just before Lent when we confront our sinfulness and see Jesus' compelling trek to the Cross to make possible what might seem impossible. **Left to ourselves, humans and love don't belong in the same sentence.** That may sound alarming to you; but think about it. Humans love? How can that be? That is unless God is also included with all His love and mercy. Perhaps the greatest paradox is that in God's eyes, we humans—made in God's image—have the capacity to love.

I want us to turn to several passages in 1 John 4 to explore just how God can make this paradoxical miracle happen...we can love! We can love God; we can love others.

"God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins...We love each other because he loved us first."

It All Starts with God's Love

"This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins"

At the heart of the paradox of love is that we cannot create love in and of ourselves. **Real love is generated in the heart of God.** God's essence is love. That love compelled God to send Jesus and not only send Jesus but to offer, to give Jesus as a sacrifice for our sake.

That leads us to another aspect of real love: it is sacrificial. It wouldn't be love without being sacrificial.

Sgt. Dennis Weichel, (pronounced WY-KLE) 29, died in Afghanistan in 2012 as he lifted an Afghan girl who was in the path of a large military vehicle barreling down a road. Weichel, a Rhode Island National Guardsman, was riding along in a convoy in eastern Afghanistan when some children were spotted on the road ahead.

The children were picking up shell casings lying on the road. The casings are recycled for money in Afghanistan. Weichel and other soldiers got out of their vehicles to get them out of the way of the heavy trucks in the convoy. The children were moved out of the way, but an Afghan girl darted back onto the road to pick up some more casings right in the path of a speeding 16 ton armored truck.

Weichel spotted the girl and quickly moved toward her to get her out of the way. He succeeded, but not before he was run over by the heavily armored truck. The girl was safe, but Weichel died of his injuries. Dennis was 29 years old and had arrived in Afghanistan only a few weeks before.

Staff Sgt. Ronald Corbett, who deployed with Weichel to Iraq in 2005, said, "He would have done it for anybody," adding, "That was the way he was. He would give you the shirt off his back if you needed it. He was that type of guy."

This is a powerful way to illustrate Christ's sacrificial love for us, although one major difference is that he died for us while we were yet sinners and enemies.

Real love changes our hearts. Forgives our sin. God's initiative in loving us has power to change us. Forgiveness is not merely about God removing our guilt; it is about the inside change that happens in our hearts when Jesus' blood atones for our sin. Not only our sins are forgiven; our sin nature is in the process of being transformed. This puts us on the road to being empowered to love God and love others.

Loved by God, We Can Love Others

*"Dear friends, since God loved us that much, **we surely ought to love each other.** No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, **God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.**" (4:11-12)*

*"**We love each other because he loved us first.**" (4:19)*

Have you been loved by God? Why, of course, you might say? I am in church, aren't I? But still I ask you, have you been loved by God? Have you been convinced in your heart of hearts that it isn't your performance for God but purely receiving His grace and love that makes you God's dearly loved

children. We banter the phrase “God’s unconditional love” around quite a bit. But do you actually live like it? I find so many church goers, who would say that they believe that, but who live like God is angry at them or disappointed with them. Why? Because in the minds and hearts they don’t feel like they have measured up to God’s performance standards.

I read about a family who adopted an older child from an unspeakably horrific orphanage in another country. When they brought her home, one of the things they told her was that she was expected to clean her room every day. When she heard about that responsibility, she fixated on it and saw it as a way she would earn her family’s love. In other words, she isolated the responsibility and applied it to her existing frame of thinking that was shaped by life in the orphanage.

Thus, every morning when her parents came in her room, it was immaculate and she would sit on the bed and would say, **“My room is clean. Can I stay? Do you still love me?”** Her words broke her new parents’ hearts.

Eventually, the girl learned to hear her parents’ words as their unconditionally beloved child who would never be forsaken, not as a visitor trying to earn her place in the family. After she knew that she was an inseparable part of the family story, even correction and discipline did not cause her to question her family’s love for her; she understood correction and discipline to be part of what it meant to be in the family.

Folks, God loves you unconditionally! You don’t have to live in fear about whether God will fall out of love for you if you mess up. You don’t have to be a superstar on the church performance treadmill to win God’s approval or love. God is love in God’s very essence.

This is the secret of this amazing paradox. **Because Jesus first loved us, we can love.** Only until we experience the love of God through Christ are we set free to begin a lifetime of love. And the essence of that lifetime of love is to do what God did in Christ. Because God loved and thus gave, so too are called into a life of generous giving. If love is fundamentally something you do, the fundamental thing you do is to **give**—and give not just anything, but something personal and precious, something of yourself. God gave his Son. Jesus gave his life. **Love is giving of yourself.**

But that’s where we discover an amazing surprise—one of the most delightful in all Scripture! When we love as an overflow of being loved, we discover God living within us, empowering us in this life of love.

One of my mentors, Gary Burge, says it this way: *“Moreover, John goes on to say that as we meet this obligation to love, we experience something unparalleled: **God lives within us as his love is made complete through us.**”* And, of course, this is made possible through the Holy Spirit. God’s own Spirit is powerfully alive within us as we obey and love (4:13)

The Risk of Generous Love

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." 1 John 3:16

But not only giving ourselves. Bryan Wilkerson builds on the core definition of love: ***"Love is giving of yourself for the good of others, even for those with whom you have differences."***

Love is giving of yourself for the good of others —to meet a need, to serve a purpose. Jesus didn't lay down his life just to prove how devoted he was. He laid down his life for *us*, to pay for our sins so we could be forgiven. ***God didn't send his Son just to get our attention; rather, he sent his Son to rescue us, "in order that we might live through him."***

And that was risky business. We could have—as so many have—turned out backs on Jesus' offer of love; we could have refused to be rescued. Risky it was. Jesus was nailed to a Cross. And when we love others, we risk being hurt, wounded, and yes, even killed. And yet, despite the risk, we keep loving.

A pastor from Oxford named ***Vaughn Roberts*** put it this way: *"When you love people who are like you, that's **ordinary**. When you love people who are unlike you, that's **extraordinary**. When you love people who dislike you, that's **revolutionary**."* That's the kind of love John is calling us to—the kind of love the world is waiting to see.

Conclusion

Michelangelo, the great Renaissance artist, is known for his statue of David and the incredible Sistine Chapel. But what many don't know is that Michelangelo lived as the Reformation was sweeping through Europe and was influenced himself by Reformation ideas about justification by grace through faith.

Michelangelo was plagued throughout his life to live up to his own and others' high demands for his artwork. But as he approached his death, [a spiritual rebirth began to occur](#). One of his final works, intended to be his gravestone, was a statue of himself, in the guise of Nicodemus—the one who was "born again" (John 4)—holding the dead body of Jesus. You can see the statue at the Duomo Museum in Florence, Italy, where [a poem](#) by Michelangelo is printed on the opposite wall. In the poem, Michelangelo describes coming to the end of his life and seeing that his artwork was actually harmful to his soul because it became "my idol and my King." At the end of the day, his only hope was not in being a great artist or receiving acclaim from others, but rather, the ***"divine Love, who to embrace us, opened his arms upon the cross."***

Loving One Another

⁷ Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

¹³ And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. ¹⁴ Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. ¹⁶ We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.

God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. ¹⁷ And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

¹⁸ Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. ¹⁹ We love each other because he loved us first.

Lift High the Cross

Refrain:

*Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.*

*1 Come, Christians, follow this triumphant sign.
The hosts of God in unity combine. [Refrain]*

*2 Each newborn servant of the Crucified
bears on the brow the seal of him who died. [Refrain]*

*3 O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
as thou hast promised, draw the world to thee. [Refrain]*

*4 So shall our song of triumph ever be:
Praise to the Crucified for victory! [Refrain]*

The Gift of Love

*1 Though I may speak with bravest fire,
and have the gift to all inspire,
and have not love, my words are vain,
as sounding brass, and hopeless gain.*

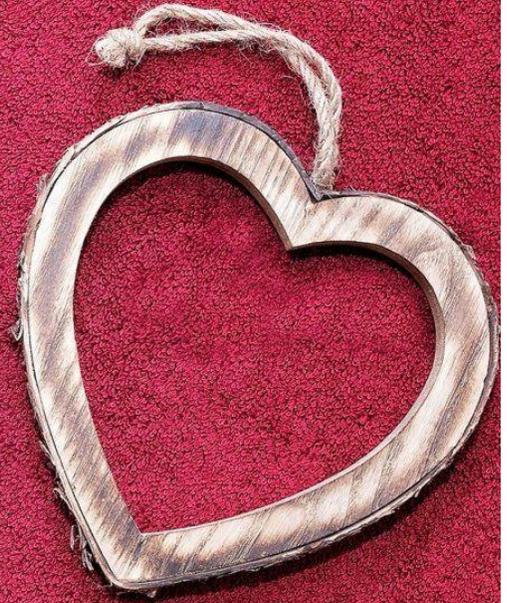
*2 Though I may give all I possess,
and striving so my love profess,
but not be given by love within,
the profit soon turns strangely thin.*

*3 Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control,
our spirits long to be made whole.
Let inward love guide every deed;
by this we worship, and are freed.*

*"Let us love one
another, for love comes
from God.*

*Everyone who loves has
been born of God and
knows God."*

1 John 4:7 NIV



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