

McCabe United Methodist Church

May 2, 2010

“O, For A Love Like That!”

John 13:31-35

Pastor Art Scanson

This is another one of those proverbial group of boys and girls, age 4-8 who were asked, “What does love mean?”

Emily - age 8 said - “Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. My Mommy and Daddy are like that.”

Tommy - age 6 - “Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.”

Jessica - age 8 - “You really shouldn’t say, ‘I love you’ unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.”

Jenny - age 8 - “There are two kind of love, Our love. God’s love. But God makes both kind of them.” That’s good isn’t it? “God makes both kinds of them.”

A community in Florida had been hard hit by a hurricane—power was out, houses were flooded, roads were closed. At the Red Cross center at the local middle school, a distraught African-American woman asked tearfully for six flashlight batteries. “My kids are afraid of the dark” she explained.

“Sorry,” came the answer. “Only two batteries to a family. However, if you have relatives living with you, you can have two more for each one.”

The woman just stood there paralyzed, feeling helpless—when Ryan Abel, who is white, piped up.” “I’m a relative,” he said.

“So am I,” announced a young Chinese girl nearby.

The Red Cross worker handed the woman six batteries with a smile. (Dr. Clayton A. Cobb, <http://www.spbts.org/sermons/102324.htm>)

Jesus is in the process of preparing his disciples for the time when he would no longer be with them when he gives the new commandment. Listen to the this from John 13:31-35.

No passage in Scripture is much clearer than this one. Christians are to be known for their love. Our primary witness in this world is to love one another. As Christ Jesus has loved us, so we are to love one another. I am convinced that deep down we all know this, but sometimes we forget.

Having said this, **there many people who simply don’t know how to love.** Because they have never really been loved themselves.

Dr. William Willimon (Now Bishop) tells about a friend who spent much of his life in an orphanage. His mother took him there as a little boy. She let him out of the car under a big cedar tree and told him she would return that afternoon. She never did return.

Willimon’s friend is now middle aged. One day Willimon was to meet his friend for lunch and Willimon was late. When he arrived, only about fifteen minutes late, he found his friend in a state of high agitation, pacing about, perspiring heavily, and visibly upset. It seemed an overreaction to fifteen minutes of tardiness.

Later, this friend said to Willimon, “I just can’t help it. I know why I get so bent out of

shape when a friend is late. My mother kept me waiting under that tree at the orphanage all afternoon. And she never, ever returned. I just can't stand for someone I love to be late."

"He was now all grown up," says Willimon, "on his own, functioning quite well, yes. But he still had scars." (<http://clergyresources.net/Willimon/willHe%20Showed%20Them%20Scars.htm>) There are some people who don't know how to love because they have never been loved.

This leads me to think about the children who come for the "Say Y.E.S. Program" here at McCabe. How many of these children don't know what it is to be loved. What are the scars that need to be healed?

Rejection is a terrible thing. And it manifests itself in many ways. Many people have scars. The only way those scars will ever have a chance to heal is when they know someone loves them. That, my friends, is why God calls us to forever proclaim God's love! Because God first loves us, even if the world rejects us. Then and only then, when we understand and accept that love for ourselves, are we able to love others.

Yes, we can love because God first loves us. That's the good news.

In his book, *Many Things in Parables*, Frederick Borsch says that when his wife became pregnant with their first child, he discovered that he strongly wanted a son. Growing up he had two sisters and no brothers. He badly wanted to have a brother. Now he wanted to have a son. And he did! Benjamin was born, and Borsch says that all his parental heart went out to Benjamin with more love than he knew he had inside him.

This presented him with a dilemma when, two years later, his wife became pregnant again. How was he going to hide from his second child the fact that he could never love it as much as he loved Benjamin? Somehow his notion of love was that it was like a pie. The more people that came to share it, the smaller the slices had to be.

Then, as though to make matters worse, his wife delivered twins! But then something miraculous happened. Suddenly Borsch discovered he loved Matthew and Stuart with the same love with which he loved Benjamin, without taking any love from Benjamin. "This was a strange new arithmetic," says Borsch now. "The pie seemed to have become larger."

Let's imagine how big God's pie is. Limitless. We are loved by One with an infinite capacity for love. God's love creates within us the capacity to love others.

Yes, love creates the capacity for more love. People who have experienced love are able to pass that love on to others. While the reason there are so many angry, unloving people in the world is that so many people have never experienced true unconditional love.

Further, I am convinced there are many good people in the church who have never experienced unconditional love from others. Some of us were brought up by well-meaning parents who, without really being conscious of it, put conditions on their love. "I love you when your are good." was the basic message.

Oh, our parents more than likely didn't mean those conditional messages to take hold, but they did. And so, many of us grew up with feelings of unworthiness—with the feeling that somehow we didn't quite measure up to our parents' expectations. And perhaps we are unknowingly passing the same message on to our children.

Please don't lift your hand, but can anyone relate to this? Yes, there are many people who are unable to love, or have difficulty

allowing God to love them, because they have never been loved unconditionally themselves. We go through life, acting out in many heart-breaking ways, the question “Am I worthy to be loved?” And when no satisfactory answer comes, we become unable to maintain healthy relationships. We have little capacity for love, with no genuine love to pass on to others.

Here is our key task - **It is vitally important that we pass on God’s love to people, especially those who have never known such love.** Remember Jesus’ words from our Scripture lesson for today? *“A new commandment I give to you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Pastor Gary Smith tells about a wonderful display of this kind of love in an NBA first round playoff game. The Portland Trail Blazers were playing the Dallas Mavericks in front of twenty thousand fans in the Rose Garden Arena in Portland. At the beginning of the game, a local girl, thirteen-year-old Natalie Gilbert walked to mid-court to sing “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Natalie did fine at first, but somewhere around “the twilight’s last gleaming,” her mind went blank. She closed her eyes, shook her head, and was on the verge of tears. Suddenly there was an arm around her. It was Maurice Cheeks, coach of the Trail Blazers. With his arm around Natalie, this coach began singing the next line and then invited the crowd to join in. Coach Maurice,

Natalie, and twenty thousand fans make it all the way through to “The home of the brave.” (Cited by The Rev. Melissa Skelton, <http://www.stpaulseattle.org/sermons/080308.html>.)

Here is what Jesus’ greatest dream is for each of us. Jesus wants to build within each of us the capacity to love as he loves. An unconditional love with which Jesus loves each of us. We are grateful that Jesus didn’t wait until we were worthy. Neither should we wait until others are worthy.

Friends, are we capable of such love? Are we? If not, then let’s pray together that God will increase our capacity for love. Let’s pray that God will help us to feel so loved in spite of our unworthiness that we will be able to pass on that love to others.

Let’s act in love that we might come to know love. God will be our helper.

Let us pray.