

Memorial Day Sermon How's Your Love Life? W.A. Smith

Psalm 1 and John 15: 9 – 17

How's your love life this morning? Oh, I am not referring to the romantic part of your life. I mean how is it going in the area of giving and receiving love to your neighbor, your family, your enemy? You say you haven't felt very loving lately? Or perhaps you feel you haven't had much love to give because others haven't been giving to you. It is predictable that when most of us think of loving others we do measure it in terms of our emotional responses. Perhaps that is why when our Lord was instructing his disciples and all of us in this area, he did not say "when you're feeling good and have had a good day, I want you to love one another as I have loved you." To be very honest, if we love as Christ loved us, it is probably not something we feel like doing. Dennis the Menace was talking to Margaret one day. "I wonder what my mom would like for her birthday?" he asked. Margaret answered: "Why don't you promise to go to bed when she tells you – to keep your room cleaned up – to eat all your vegetables at dinner – even brush your teeth after eating, and wash your hands before." Dennis looked at her, scowling thoughtfully. "No, I mean something practical."

Jesus knew that if he waited until he felt like dying on a cross out of his love for us, it would never happen. He knew that emotional love is usually a response to someone who is lovable. And, he said, "Even the Gentiles know how to do that." No, when Jesus said, "Love one another," he was giving us a command to set our wills and our hearts toward a particular lifestyle, a particular attitude of treating others that would have the same power to change the world as his ultimate sacrifice and resurrection. The ability to love in this way would not come from our emotions but from the Holy Spirit living within us. It is the love Paul refers to when he lists the fruits of the Holy Spirit: peace, joy, love, and others. It is NOT a love we produce. It is a love that flows through us when we have set our wills to obey our Lord's command. So let us spend a few minutes this morning looking at this special kind of love that most of us don't feel like giving. But when we obey our Lord's command to give it, the world around us is transformed into the very Kingdom of God.

Consider the contrast between wanting to love and deciding to love in Christ's name. Marlin Walsh is a 72 year old tree farmer in Central Ohio, His mother and father grew up on the family farm, he raised his six children on the same farm, and he is known country wide as an upright, gentle Christian man. In the 90's when he contracted leukemia and was forced to spend several months in the hospital receiving chemotherapy, the local newspaper ran a picture story of over 20 neighbors who voluntarily went in the month before Christmas and harvested his Christmas trees so that his business wouldn't suffer. When asked why they were willing to give so much time and energy, one man said, "We're just paying back Marlin for all the countless times he has helped us out. He has always been willing to do whatever he could to come to our aid."

Now, certainly, the neighbors' act of love is a wonderful gesture and is to be admired. But it is NOT the kind of love which Christ is commanding us to give in his name.

Contrast this with the true story of a man named Dr. James Phillips who spent most of his life as a missionary to India. At the turn of the last century he purchased a ticket for a long awaited vacation back to the United States. He had counted down the months and days until he would be home. A few days before he was to leave he heard about some Jews who had escaped the wrath of the Nazis. They had traveled by boat to India seeking refuge. Since it was a time of

global war, The India government denied their request to immigrate. They were granted permission to stay for a short time in the lofts of the buildings near the dock. Their living conditions were wretched. But it was better than being sent to a concentration camp in Germany.

It was Christmas Eve when Dr. Phillips heard about the plight of these Jewish people. Immediately he went to the dock, entered the first building and called out, "Merry Christmas! What would you like for Christmas?" The response was slow. "We're Jewish," someone called out. "I know," Phillips said, "but what would you like for Christmas?" The weary Jews, fearful for their very lives, replied, "We would like some German pastries." At that point James Phillips sold his ticket to the United States and purchased more German pastries than anyone had ever seen. He bought lots and lots of them and carried them in large baskets.

Later he told this story to a group of students. One brash, judgmental young man reprimanded him. "You should not have done that," he said "they were not even Christians." "No, they weren't," the wise missionary quietly replied, "but I am." The first story of loving in Christ's name is understandable. The second is not. It doesn't make sense why one would give up a long awaited trip, well deserved, to buy German pastries for a group of strangers who weren't even Christians. BUT such is the nature of the love of Christ we are commanded to show. Nowhere in the story of James Phillips do we read anything about his feelings but I guarantee you that his heart was full of joy and love as he acted upon the command of our Lord to love as he loved us.

There are three obvious qualities of the love Christ gives us to share through His Spirit.

FIRST, as in the case of James Phillips, Christ's love senses a need that others may see but not respond to. Others certainly were aware of the Jewish immigrants and their plight. They perhaps even said a prayer for them. BUT the love of Christ within Dr. Phillip's heart and his willingness to obey...called him to action. It wasn't convenient. It wasn't the outreach project of his church. Thus it was NOT the response of the majority. There were no obvious resources available to meet the need, but Dr. Phillips knew he must do something. It is the same kind of love that Jesus showed when he ministered to the lepers or the prostitutes or the outcasts. It was NEVER convenient, it was never popular... the resources were seldom available. BUT HE SAW THE NEED WITH HIS FATHER'S HEART AND RESPONDED.

SECONDLY, to love as Christ loved always involves a sacrifice. In Phillips' instance it was his ticket home. That was something important in his life. It represented hopes and dreams of his heart. But when Christ's love calls us to respond, we usually have to choose between obeying Him or holding on to our life. Remember the verse, (Matt. 10:39), "He who would hold onto his life will lose it. He who loses it for my sake will find it."

Mother Teresa heard vows from eleven new members of her growing order, the Society of the Missionaries of Charity, at which she spoke these words to the sisters who had completed their profession of vows..."Love to be real, must cost," said the frail and stooped Mother Teresa, then 75, whose big voices belies her stature, "It must hurt. It must empty us of self."

AND THIRDLY, Christ's love usually results in concrete action. A story in the "Sunshine Magazine" regarding a professor of psychology illustrates how difficult it is to love others. Although he had no children of his own, whenever he saw a neighbor scolding a child for some wrongdoing, he would say, "You should love your boy, not punish him." One hot summer afternoon the professor was doing some repair work on a concrete driveway leading to his

garage. Tired out after several hours of work, he laid down the trowel, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and started toward the house. Just then out of the corner of his eye he saw a mischievous little boy putting his foot into the fresh cement. He rushed over, grabbed him, and was about to spank him severely when a neighbor leaned from a window and said, "Watch it, professor! Don't you remember? You must 'love' the child!" At this, he yelled back furiously, "I do love him in the abstract but NOT in the concrete!"

Our Lord didn't just talk about compassion, He knelt down in the dirt next to the woman caught in adultery who was being stoned. Jesus didn't merely say God will provide for your needs if you trust Him, He took loaves and fishes and fed five thousand people who were hungry. Our Savior didn't merely say a person must die to themselves in order to inherit the Kingdom of God, He physically gave His body and life up to the cross out of love so that everyone may have eternal life. He didn't merely say it would be a good thing to forgive your enemies when they persecute you. He forgave every one of them as they pierced His side and pounded nails into His wrists. **IT IS THIS POWER OF LOVE HE WANTS TO DEMONSTRATE THROUGH ALL WHO WILL FOLLOW HIS COMMANDS AND LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS HE HAS LOVED US.**

Will you heed His call this morning? Will you decide here in prayer that you will obey Him this week, even if you don't feel like it? Will you tell Him that you are willing to meet the needs around you with His love if He shows them to you? If you say "YES" I can promise you the beginning of one of the most exciting adventures of faith you have ever undertaken.

Lord Jesus, help me to love more and more like you loved. Amen