

Rev. Janet R. Doyle

Elmer Presbyterian Church

5th Sunday after Epiphany

Sunday, February 9, 2025

Scripture: I Corinthians 13: 1-13

Sermon: Love Is More Powerful Than Death

An unusual survey was done a few years ago. Participants in the survey were asked this question. What 3-word sentence would you most like to hear or have said to you ? The top three answers pretty much sum up the needs of all of us. 1. I love you. 2. I forgive you. 3. Supper is ready. Doesn't that pretty much sum up our needs. We have emotional, physical, and most importantly spiritual needs. We need to be loved, forgiven, and we need provision. God meets every one of these needs. In fact he meets all of these needs because of one primary thing, and that is an eternal, unconditional fact that He loves us. I want us to think this morning about the love of God that is more powerful than death because Jesus had victory over death.

In 1 John 3: 1 it says, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are." The love of God is unlike any other love that we can experience. There is no other like it. It is greater than a mother's love or a father's love and greater than the love that one might have for a spouse. It is foreign, it is unusual, it is out of this world.

Jesus came into our world to show us the great love of God. He became flesh; descended from the throne of heaven and took upon himself the form of a servant. Jesus lived on this earth for a little over 33 years, and then demonstrated the love of God in the greatest way, he died on the cross for the sins of all of humanity. God's love is more powerful than death.

"God is love." In 1 John 4: 7-8, he writes: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

God is love. This is a remarkable statement. John is saying that for God love is not a passing sentiment; it is who God is. Love is not something that comes and goes; it is who God is. God is love. It is His essential nature. God cannot be unloving, because He is love.

Then John applies it to us. Because God is love, we're to love one another. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

John says it again in 1 John 4:16 "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."

God is love. We know and rely on the love God has for us. What kind of love does God have for us? John says:

1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

The Father lavishes His great love on us! He calls us His children and it's true! That's what we are! You are God's beloved child. Think about it: God calls you His child. Do you love your children? You'd do anything for your children; you'd die for your children. God did that for you. He loves you like a parent loves his or her children. He is absolutely committed to your wellbeing, to doing what is best for you. Do you believe that?

1 John 4:16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

The word "rely on" translates to the Greek word "*pisteuo*", which is usually translated "*believe*" or "*trust*". We know and believe in God's love for us. How many of you know that God loves you as His own child? How many of you believe in God's love for you? We say we believe in God's love, but often we don't act like it. We think God loves us when we're good and rejects us when we're not. But that isn't true.

Romans 5:8 says to us, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

When did God demonstrate His love for us? While we were sinners!

Believing the truth will set us free, but it's a battle for us. We have entrenched beliefs, mental strongholds that have to be broken down and replaced with the truth. This particular mental stronghold that love must be earned or deserved is pervasive in our world. We've all grown up in a

culture where acceptance is based on performance, so we naturally assume that God must be like that too. He's not. God is love. He loves you not because of anything you do, but because He is love.

Do you know and believe that God loves you right now? It will change your life. Start telling yourself the truth about God's love.

Love is doing. Love is not mere emotion; it's action. We are commanded to love: love God, love your neighbor, love your spouse and children, love your enemies! Love is an action. Love is doing.

Love is doing what's best for another. To love someone is to be committed to their wellbeing, to want and do the very best for them. This is why love sometimes says "no". This is why love doesn't enable harmful behaviors. This is why parent's discipline. Love does what is best for another no matter what it costs you. Love is costly. Love involves sacrifice, and service, and is often painful and difficult.

Love is doing what's best for another no matter what it costs you.

John 3:16 reminds us, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

God so loved that He gave. God's love did something: He gave His one and only Son. Why did He do it? For our good: so that we wouldn't perish, but would have eternal life. Was it costly? Yes. It cost God more than we can imagine—the life of His one and only Son.

How do we know what love is? Jesus showed us by laying down His life for us. Jesus defines love—He shows us that love is doing what's best for another no matter what it costs you.

1 John 4:9-10 says, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

God is love. God loves you. God is absolutely committed to doing what is best for you. God wants what is best for you and has gone to incredible lengths to make that happen. God loves you, right now, just as you are. God wants what is best for you.

When Jesus was about to depart out of the world to return to the Father, the disciples still needed to have their feet washed, and he loved

them enough to take the basin and the towel and wash their feet. “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”

Love is stronger than death!! Love is more powerful than death itself. The Apostle Paul says “for me to live is for Christ and to die is gain”. Because love is stronger than death!

Our scripture today, 1 Corinthians 13 is known as the “love chapter.” It is usually read at weddings to remind us of the importance of love in a marriage but as we know love is a part of all relationships in life. The Apostle Paul writes this chapter because he wants us to understand why love matters so very much, why it is so critical in our Christian lives and is the manual for us to follow. Paul tells us love matters because without it, nothing else will. Love matters because love makes us like Christ. Love matters because love lasts forever.

This love is essential to the life of a follower of Jesus. This love is effective for promoting the fruit of the Spirit, and pointing the world back to Jesus Christ. This love is eternal. Love lasts longer than this world, because we carry this love with us into eternity. This is the kind of love that each one of us is called to practice. It is a love that increases the righteousness and glory of God when it is practiced. This is the kind of love that God commands each of us to practice all the days of our lives.

Listen again to 1 Corinthians 13: “ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

The primary way the world is going to know that we are truly followers of Christ is how we love. As followers of Christ, love flows from God through us and endures forever.

May we be a people who have been captivated by this love from God and radically changed by it.