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Love, Part 1
Teachings of Jesus- Week 8

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.

A minister was speaking to a Sunday school class about the things money can't buy. "It can't buy laughter and it can't buy love," he told them. Driving his point home, he said, "What would you do if I offered you \$1,000 not to love your mother and father?" Stunned silence ensued. Finally a small voice queried, "How much would you give me not to love my big sister?"

Let's start with a video. This is called, "What Is Love?"

Video: 3:45

In the book, *Children's Letters to God: The New Collection*, a little girl named Nan writes this letter:

"Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I have trouble loving them!"

Love is foundational to life. We get in all kinds of trouble and experience all kinds of joy because we want—no, we need—love. Our scriptures reflect the centrality of love and say that "God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). The gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) mention love over eighty times! Jesus gives love an important place in his teaching, and he understands love in an inclusive way that includes our relationships with others, with God, and even with our self.

Here is one of the foundational texts on love, Mark 12: 28-31:

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Let's pray...

Today, I want to look at several texts that are about love. It is good to talk about love on Mother's Day, because many of us first learned about love from our moms.

But love is also hard to talk about. I am not sure why, but maybe it has something to do with how much we use the word (*I love popcorn, I love my privacy*). Or maybe it is because our understanding of love is very unclear—sometimes it seems only to have to do with sex, while other times it is used to describe a feeling, but not an action.

But I think it is also one of those theological, OF COURSEs! You know, of course *we are to love, who doesn't know that?*

What does Jesus teach about love? We are studying Jesus' teachings, and so what we do today will be grounded in his words found in scripture. And like most of Jesus' teaching, we are called to a superior way. I say this because Jesus came among us to show us how to live. The only way we can find out whether Jesus shows us the best way to live is to act on his teachings. So what does Jesus say about love?

Well, he says that love is not optional. Jesus makes that abundantly clear. And the kind of love to which we are called is the love Jesus has for us. A love that gives all. A love that doesn't put selfishness or comfort first. A love that knows there will be sacrifice. A love that is real and vulnerable.

Sometimes people ask me what the purpose of life is. I am thinking these days that our purpose in life is to learn how to love. Nothing is harder. Nothing eludes us like learning how to love.

Love is the proof of our discipleship. Love, not knowledge, not doctrine, is proof that we follow Jesus. Jesus says, in John 15:9-17,

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servant any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." How do we love as Jesus loves?

Do you remember the runaway bride story? It happened in 2005 that a young woman ran away from her wedding, but instead of saying that, she said she had been kidnapped. Can you imagine? The morning show I sometimes watch had it as the top news story for several days!

One thing that struck me was that everyone had an opinion about this woman. She was crazy, she was mentally unstable, she was a criminal. Then, once her husband-to-be spoke publicly, folks judged him too, calling him silly for forgiving and loving her. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't want to be judged by one episode in my life.

Is judgment part of love? The text that most often comes to mind is a teaching of Jesus on judgment. Let's look at it, this is Luke 6:37-39:

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." He also told them a parable: "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?"

Lots of times we read this and think that it means we are never to judge. In fact, that is the most common understanding of this text. Actually, the teaching says that, however we judge, in what manner we make judgments will be the manner in which judgments are made of us.

Jesus isn't against judgment. Instead, he knows that there is a place for judgment. He himself says,

"Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you." (Matthew 7:6)

"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me." (John 5:30)

"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." (John 7:24)

Other New Testament verses on judgment say:

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (Romans 14:10)

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you? For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. (1 Cor. 5:3)

Maybe these verses give you a better foundation to understand the place of judgment. It may also help you to know that the word for judgment in Greek (*Krion*) means conclude or sentence (as in being sentenced), and in Hebrew (*Bin*) the word means justice or ruling.

The issue then is not judgment, but *right* judgment. Do we make right, grounded, real judgments, or do we judge out of our own emotions, fears, immaturities, or anxiety? Do we have enough information or understand deeply enough the situation? Do we judge to feel better than others? Do we judge because we think we are so blameless?

Here is an illustration. When Jacob was a new baby, Jeff and I moved to our first home. I had seen it first, and thought it was very cute. But I did notice that the house next door was not in the best of repair. The paint was old and peeling. It had seen a lot of wear and tear, and made the neighborhood look less than well cared for.

It would have been very easy to think that the neighbors had little concern for the outside of their home; maybe we might have thought they were lazy. But in actuality our neighbors ended up being Jeff's cousin and his family! We didn't know it when we made the bid on the house. And as it turns out, they were in process of doing many things around the house, and next on the list was painting the outside of the house.

We must be very careful with our judgments. Many, many times we judge without all the facts. And even if we do have “the facts”, our judgment is always to be guided by a desire to restore, not to punish. Do you hear that? Desire to restore, and not to punish.

Do not judge and you will not be judged means that there is a binding connection between the judgments we make and the ones we will receive. And the order of judgment is important: first you judge yourself and take the log out of your own eye. Many times we forget that part, don't we?

If we read the entire passage and its parallel text (Matthew 7:1-6), we see that it does not prevent us from judging or making judgments, but instead insists that we not judge if we are not willing to stand under judgment based upon the same standards by which we judge. It makes you think, doesn't it?

So, if **one** way we live out Jesus' call to love is by understanding the place of judgment in relationships, the **second** one comes from the fact that loving calls us to act, not just talk.

Here is our text:

So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." Then he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother', and "Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God)— then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this." (Mark 7:5-13)

A good text for Mother's Day!

Jesus is discussing tradition with the one of the religious groups of the time. There were many traditions back then about hand washing and the Sabbath. Jesus lifts up that what God commands is more important than traditions.

In this text, Jesus says that these people don't give to support their elderly parents, but tell them, "Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban..." What is Corban?

"Anything dedicated to the temple by pronouncing the votive word 'Corban' forthwith belonged to the temple, but only ideally; actually it might remain in the possession of the one who made the vow. So a son might be justified in not supporting his old parents simply because he designated his property or a part of it as a gift to the temple, that is, as 'Corban.' There was no necessity of fulfilling his vow, yet he was actually prohibited from ever using his property for the support of his parents." (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database, 1996, BibleSoft, "Corban"*).

Jesus taught that proclaiming something as Corban as an excuse for refusing to help one's needy parents was a violation of the Fifth Commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." (Exodus 20:12).

Jesus wants us to know that love is not just a feeling, it is how we act. Jesus says that people who do not act in accordance with love are at best hypocrites, and at worst, commandment breakers.

We all know that how we are treated and how we act toward others sometimes says a lot more than any words. Frankly, some of us are big talkers. We like to sound loving, but when love calls for us to move beyond the comfortable, we struggle. Maybe we struggle to show our love because we feel vulnerable and fearful that it won't be returned. Let me talk about one loving action that many people struggle with. It is letting go.

In the midst of your life, there are those times when you may be aware that the most loving thing you can do is to step aside, to let the other person go. Rather than a washing your hands of the person and situation, letting go is actually much more spiritual and loving, if that is what is called for.

I think about that as my son is getting older. This week he turned 13, and each day he is more independent. Letting go means that we trust God and that we realize each person must find his or her own way. These anonymous words are helpful.

- To "let go" does not mean to stop caring; it means that I can't do it for someone else.
- To "let go" is not to cut myself off; it is the realization that I can't control another.
- To "let go" is not to enable, but to allow learning from natural consequences.
- To "let go" is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.
- To "let go" is not to try to change or blame another; it is to make the most of myself.
- To "let go" is not to care for, but to care about.
- To "let go" is not to fix, but to be supportive.
- To "let go" is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being.
- To "let go" is not to be in the middle arranging the outcomes, but to allow others to effect their own destinies.
- To "let go" is not to be protective; it is to permit another to face reality.
- To "let go" is not to deny, but to accept.
- To "let go" is not to nag, scold or argue, but instead to search out my own shortcomings and to correct them.
- To "let go" is not to adjust everything to my desires, but to take each day as it comes, and to cherish myself in it.
- To "let go" is not to criticize and regulate anybody, but to try to become what I dream I can be.
- To "let go" is not to regret the past, but to grow and to live for the future.
- To "let go" is to fear less and to love more.

SOURCE: "To 'Let Go' Takes Love" Author unknown, Quoted by Chuck Swindoll in "The Grace Awakening" (1990, Word Publishing).

We are called to be a people of love. I like how 1 John says it:

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.

Let us pray.