

Intro.: Love makes the world go round. Love conquers all. All you need is love. Do these phrases sound familiar? Of course there are many more like them.

Pop culture, poets, and regular old people like you and me, proclaim the power and wonder of love. It is something we value. We love our families and friends. We love our favorite foods. We love good books and movies and television shows. And think of the number of articles and books written on the subject of finding and keeping love. I think it's probably safe to say that we love the idea of love. So it is no surprise that Jesus' words about love are some of his most famous and best-known of all.

Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus says: **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16)**

I. Love Greater Than All Other Love.

This "so much" love of God is something much bigger than our love for foods or books or movies, or even our family and friends. It is a love greater than any other. Even if our love is genuine and heart-felt God's love is beyond comparison, because it is love in its purist, divine, heavenly form. There is no greater love than the so much love of God.

When we meditate on these words of Christ in our gospel today, we see what true, godly love really looks like. It is not just emotional, romantic, or sexual love. True love is not just some feeling inside our hearts or our bellies or any other part of our bodies. No. True, holy, godly love is characterized by what it does.

God loves the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son to be lifted up on the cross - lifted up to die - for our salvation. God loves the world so much that by his grace he gives everlasting life to those who then believe in that only-begotten Son of His. God loves the world so much that he daily and richly gives us all that we need for this body and life, and all that we need for our everlasting life in the world to come.

Godly love is not just a feeling, nor is it about getting something in return. True, godly love is one that gives fully and unconditionally. St. John makes this point very clearly when He says in his first letter, **"This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 Jn. 4:10)**

II. A Love We Have Been Called To Imitate.

A. After revealing again what God's love for us is like, he then reminds us to love one another, with this same kind of love. He says, **"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." (Jn. 4:11)**

God is calling all of us to love each other in the same way He loves the world, with a love that gives, expecting nothing in return. The apostle Paul puts it this way, **"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends...So now faith, hope and love remain, but the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:4-8a, 13)**

What St. Paul is describing is nothing other than God-like, selfless, giving love. It is the love which God pours upon us in Jesus who lived and died for our salvation. And it is the love He pours into us in our baptism and through His Word as the Holy Spirit calls us to believe in Christ and to put our trust in God's all-giving love. In that love we live under the promise that we will not perish, but have eternal life with the one who loves us so much.

B. This love is the love which God demands of us - a selfless, giving love. Jesus tells us as He told His disciples: **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn. 13:34-35)**

Christ's commandment is that our love be no less and no different than his divine love. Our love is to be one that not only feels, but acts and does something. It is to be a love that does not seek to take, but to give. Christ calls on us to love sacrificially, even to the point of giving up our own lives for his sake, and for the sake of those He loves. What St. Paul says to husbands regarding their wives in Ephesians 5, could be considered God's call to all of us in relation to all people, to love others even: **"as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her; that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing with water through the Word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:25b-27)**

C. All of these words about love from Christ and His chosen apostles makes it very clear that our love, the love we have for God and for one another, is not quite what it should be. When measured against God's "so much" love for us it is evident that we have so little love in our hearts for anyone or anything but ourselves.

Over the years as a pastor and as a police chaplain I have seen how perverted our idea of love can be. I have seen women bloodied and beaten, being told by their boyfriends who are being dragged away in handcuffs how much they love them. I have heard how those women go and bail them out so that they can come home and show them some more of that kind of abusive love. I have listened to couples who say they love each other as they fight, say mean and hurtful things to one another, and call one another names that I would not cast upon my worst enemies. And I have watched as one spouse tells the other that the love they once had confessed and vowed to them no longer exists. They don't feel anything for them anymore. They don't love them anymore. They just are not getting anything out of the marriage, so they are getting out of the marriage. And the truth be told, my love for my wife, my children, my friends, and you my congregation is not much better, purer or more godly. What about yours?

It is clear that our love for God is not as pure and holy and zealous as it ought to be. And neither is our love for one another charitable enough, generous enough, or sacrificial enough. Perhaps we listen too much to the culture and the poets, and other regular folks like ourselves and learn our love from them, rather than from the Word of God, and Christ Jesus our Lord. Perhaps we trust the feelings of our hearts or stomachs or the impulses of our bodies too much. Whatever the case, our love is inadequate, it is selfish, and it is sinful.

So today Christ calls on each of us to repent of our sinful love. He is calling to us, "Repent of the love in your heart that does not love me best and most. Repent of the love in your gut that longs for earthly food and worldly possessions over the heavenly banquet and the riches of my everlasting kingdom of righteousness. Repent of the love in your members that desires union with another over communion with me.

III. Repent And Live In God's So Much Love.

A. Today Christ calls on us to repent, to turn away from our sins and turn to Him, to hear him tell us, sinners that we are and loveless and unlovable as we can be, God still loves us. He loves us so much. Hear it again, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*** (Jn. 3:16)

God loves us so much, that he gave his only-begotten Son to suffer on the cross for our sinful, inadequate love. God loves us so much, that he gave his only-begotten Son to die unloved, that our love might be redeemed and restored. God loves us so much, that he gave his only-begotten Son to die upon the cross to forgive our perverted idea of love, and transform it into a love that is zealous for God, and charitable, generous, and sacrificial for the benefit of others.

B. So we will love like God, but only by the doing and giving of His love. John reminds us of this when he writes, again in his first letter: ***"We love, because He first loved us."*** (1 Jn. 4:19)

We love God because He first loved us so much that He sent His Son not to condemn us, but to save us. And so born again from above by the water and the Spirit our hearts are filled with His love and we are able to love our neighbor with a so much love also. We can and will love them with a giving and sacrificial love, for the same reason we are able to love God. We love them because God first loved both them and us. It is only good and right and even natural that His love should produce in us a greater, purer, even divine love for all things.

Concl.: Praise be to God for His so much love! Amen.