

Christ Community Covenant Church
When it Comes to Love, Actions Speak Louder Than Words”
1 John 3:11-16
Gloria Merritt - March 9, 2014

[In reference to the song just sung by the worship team]

I asked the worship team to sing this song today because it caught my attention when I heard it on the radio a couple of weeks ago. I love what the chorus says:

*Oh, we bring the Kingdom come, Oh, with every act of love
Jesus help us carry You alive in us, Your light shines through
With every act of love, we bring the Kingdom come.*

Those words certainly are appropriate as we continue this study in 1st John. Of course, love is one of the major themes of these little letters and we're going to discuss that today. More than likely, it's nothing really new to us, but John said it was a new commandment, and because our hearts are prone to wander, we seem to constantly need a stirring of our hearts from the Lord on this subject.

Let's start by reading today's text. I'd like for us to read it together from the screen in the form of a responsive reading. May the Holy Spirit speak to our hearts today as we read. Here is 1 John 3:11-18.

All: This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.
Gals: We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous.
Guys: So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it proves that we have passed from death to life.
All: But a person who has no love is still dead.
Gals: Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them.
All: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.
Guys: And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?
All: Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Please pray with me. “Lord, thank you for your word, so perfectly spoken so many years ago, but still as true as it ever was. May you speak to us and show us your heart and renew our hearts about today's subject. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

The main point that I hope each of us takes home today is that “When it comes to love, actions speak louder than words.” We've said it before that the Christian life comes down to two things. Two things that Jesus emphasized to his followers: Love God, love others. We've said it before. To expound on that, today I want to emphasize that there needs to be evidence that we love God, and one of the ways there can be evidence is in the way we love others. I know, I know, this feels like basic Christianity 101 – but hang in here. We've got some talking to do.

Let's look again at our text:

“This is the message you heard from the beginning. We should love one another.” Let me interrupt a moment and say that John puts in this interesting little side note about Cain and Abel. You might remember that Cain and Abel were sons of Adam and Eve's. It says, **“Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.”** Let's turn to Genesis 4 and review the story – starting at verse 3.

“Now Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the first born of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.’” The Lord lovingly, and graciously confronted Cain and gave him a chance to repent and abandon the hate in his heart and to choose what was right, but of course the outcome was murder. The crux of the matter here was that Abel was motivated by love and right actions, and Cain wasn’t.

And, just for a moment, let’s talk about a possible point of confusion for us, especially in this time and in this culture. Because we tend to freely throw the word love around, and because sometimes we mix Truth with half-truths – and here I’m thinking of those great theologians, the Beatles, who said, “all you need is love.” We sometimes think that Love is the opposite of Righteousness. But real love is the greatest expression of righteousness and real, true righteousness is the greatest love. Righteousness – and here we mean right actions that come from a right standing with God – righteousness without love makes one a religious Pharisee. We should never love at the expense of righteousness, and we should never try to be righteous without being filled with love.

Let’s flip back to first John where it goes on to say, **“Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.”** The hatred that Cain had in his heart was a jealous hatred. It was the same kind of jealous hatred that the Pharisees had for Jesus, the same kind of hatred that motivated them to crucify Jesus. It’s the same kind of hatred that puts persecuted believers at the hands of torturers and in front of firing squads, or at the gallows, or in death camps. It’s truly the kind of hatred that originates from Satan himself. So, we’re not supposed to be surprised when we see it.

But at the same time, we have to check our own hearts. Jesus told us that to hate our brother is to murder him in our hearts. Though we might not carry out the action because we’re afraid to, we have to be honest if we might *wish* that person dead. Or, another way we can hate a person is to completely ignore them, we may *treat* them as if they were dead. Hatred can be shown *passively* or *actively*.

Continuing with verse 14, **“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.”** Having a love for the people of God is a basic sign of being born again. It’s one of the tests that Dave mentioned to us.

So, this past week and this next week, many of the people in this room have been involved with TCAP testing. It’s the Colorado achievement test whereby they are attempting to make sure that educational standards are being met. Both of our daughters have been involved, one as a teacher, and one as a student. Neither of them seem to be very fond of the whole business, but there’s not much that can be done about it.

And right now, I’m kind of wondering what would happen if any of us encountered one of these multiple choice questions:

- 1) Do you consider yourself to be:
 - a) Buddhist
 - b) Moslem
 - c) Jewish
 - d) Atheist
 - e) none of the above

There are many people for whom being a Christian is a “none of the above” sort of thing. They consider themselves Christians because they are not Moslems, or Jewish, or Buddhists, or atheists. But being a Christian is never a “none of the above” kind of thing. Being a Christian is more than saying, “I am a Christian.” There are in fact some who claim to be Christians who are not. How can we know if we are one of these? John’s reply has been constant and simple. During this study of the epistles of John, it has already been mentioned that there are three tests to measure the proof of a genuine Christian: the truth test, the love test, and the moral test. If we believe in what the Bible teaches as true, if we show the love of Jesus to others, and if our conduct has been changed and is becoming more like Jesus, then our claim to be a Christian can be proven true.

John is very intent that we would have an assurance of eternal life by giving us something to test ourselves with. I mean, think about it, what evidence is there that you were born to your specific parents into their family? You have a birth certificate. The state of Colorado has evidence that you can lawfully

drive a car IF you have a license and your car's registration form in your glove box. The IRS demands plenty of evidence of who you are, what you earn, what you own, and how you give when you file your taxes. And then there is TCAP, which looks for evidence of both educating and learning. John says that IF we are born of God, there should be some evidence.

I need someone to volunteer to come up here right now, because I have something to tell you. (Hopefully someone does!) (Looking them in the eye) "Now, I don't want you to take this in the wrong way, but, I want you to know that I love you. Do you believe me? It's quite possible that you don't have any evidence of that, but it is my desire to seek good for you through my actions. It's my hope that you know that you matter to God and that you matter to me. Thanks for coming up here and letting me tell you that." Whew. That was a little uncomfortable, both for me, and probably for that person, too. You see, when it comes to love, things can get a little awkward, because in our language, we use the word love all inclusively, when in actuality it can mean very different things.

To understand the Biblical idea of love, we should begin by understanding the vocabulary of love among the ancient Greeks, who gave us the original language of the New Testament. I've listed these in the sermon notes.

- *Eros* was one word for love. It described, as we might guess from the word itself, *erotic* love. It referred to sexual love.
- *Storge* was the second word for love. It referred to family love, the kind of love there is between a parent and child, or between family members in general.
- *Philia* is the third word for love. It spoke of a brotherly friendship and affection. It is the love of deep friendship and partnership. It might be described as the highest love that is capable of without God's help.
- *Agape* is the fourth word for love. It described a love that loves without changing. It gives because it wants to without demanding or expecting re-payment. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected.

Many people confuse the four loves, and end up extremely hurt as a result. Often a person will tell another, "I love you" meaning one kind of love, but the other person believes they mean another kind of love. That's why I was taking a risk to tell _____, "I love you." Often two people have told one another, "I love you," when really their motivation was completely selfish. Sure, there were strong feelings in the heart - but they were feelings that *wanted* something from the other person. Girls, a guy can say 'I love you,' but what he really means is something like this: 'I want something. Not you, but something from you. I don't have time to wait. I want it immediately.' . . . This is the opposite of love, for love wants to give. Love seeks to make the other one happy, and not himself." (Walter Trobisch in *I Loved a Girl*, cited by Boice)

And how is this love defined? I'm so glad you asked!

Verse 16 says: ***"This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."*** Sacrifice. Love is sacrifice. Real love isn't merely "felt" as an inward feeling; it is also shown by demonstration - and the ultimate demonstration was the giving of Jesus on the cross. There is a real sense in which we would not *know* what love was all about if not for the work of Jesus on the cross. The exact same idea was expressed by Paul in [Romans 5:8](#) : ***But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

If I am on a pier, and a man jumps in the water and drowns, and cries out with his last breath, "I'm giving my life for you!" I cannot really comprehend that act as an act of love - it just seems strange. But if that same man jumps in the water to save me from drowning - and gives his own life that I may survive - then I can fully understand how the giving of his life was a great act of love.

So, as we look to Jesus - we remember this: He loved, therefore we love others. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Of course, we are also called to love our enemies and those who hate us ([Matthew 5:44](#)), but John calls us to a more basic test - if we can't even love our *fellow Christians* what kind of Christians are we? A gal in our women's Bible study on Tuesday sometimes says, "and I don't even like that person!" If we take the analogy from Jesus' love for us, sometimes the cost of

love will make us feel like we are *dying*- but that is what it means to *lay down* your life. "Love means saying 'No' to one's own life so that somebody else may live." (Marshall)

That sacrifice is demonstrated like what it says in verse 17: "***If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love just with words or speech but with actions and in truth.***" We often consider ourselves ready to *lay down* our lives in one great, dramatic, heroic gesture; but for most of us, God calls us to lay down our lives piece by piece, little by little in small, but important kinds of ways every day. I think that's why we enjoy great stories that have been made into movies. I really like Saving Private Ryan, such an incredible story of heroism and sacrifice. But the truth is, very few of us have the opportunity to live into such heroism. Our heroism comes more in the way of how we love and treat people on a daily basis. I think of you high school students, and students in general who have the chance to show unconditional love to the unpopular, unlovely, students around you. That's a perfect opportunity to show Christ's love right there!

More than 30 years ago, my husband and I experienced this kind of love from Christian brothers and sisters when I had a life-threatening car accident. We were caught without insurance and our church reached out to us in an incredible way to help us recover from that by rallying around us in very physical ways. We had only been attending the church for a month, and they barely knew us! Two different individuals wrote \$5,000 checks and one of the doctors attended the church and cancelled our bill. And then, years later, we experienced that same kind of Christian love during a period of unemployment. I know that I've seen that kind of love demonstrated here at 4Cs. This is a very caring church, and I've seen folks give over and above their tithes to come alongside this special family of believers. That kind of giving isn't reciprocated by the individuals who received it, but it is paid forward in the name of Christ, to those who need it next.

Is there ever a time to withhold this kind of love? Is there ever a limit to this kind of love? The only limit is the one that love itself imposes. If there are times when giving to a person, meeting their perceived or immediate need, does them harm instead of good - then the loving thing to do is to *not* give them what they ask for, but to give them what they really need instead.

About a year ago, Gary and I had a decision to make. The decision involved whether or not to open our home to someone who had been struggling to make ends meet, someone who had been unemployed for quite some time. This person was asking to move out here to Colorado and to stay with us and have a new start, while re-grouping. We knew that God called us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ and to help them in their time of need, but we had also seen this person get into the habit of laying aside personal responsibility and relying upon others in an unhealthy way. The only thing that Gary and I knew to do was to go to prayer and seek God's wisdom for the situation. We were pretty certain that we were supposed to extend help to this person, but after a time of prayer, we both felt that God said "no." We sensed that an extension of help and benevolence would stand in the way of what God was ultimately doing in this person's life. It was hard, but this time we said "no." This person was angry and accused us of not loving them the way scripture teaches. But, after time, we, along with this person have seen a redeeming work of God in fresh employment for this person along with a new beginning. Only God can do that - only God can show us exactly how to handle a situation that may require some "tough" love. But, most of the time, our response needs to be "YES!" It needs to be, "Lord, how can I respond to this person's need?" We should respond, whenever we can by actually meeting people's needs, not just offering words of love, or even words of prayer.

Remember these words from James (2:14)? "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you say to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well-fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"

And, sometimes it is easier to be enthusiastic about loving all Humanity with a capital 'H' than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, deprived, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular."

So, in closing, I'd like for us to take a little test. Let's take a test by asking ourselves some important questions and letting the Holy Spirit help us answer them. Please enjoy some quiet reflection as these questions scroll on the screen up here.

- 1) Is there plenty of evidence in my life that shows that I am a Christian?
 - a) Do I believe the Truth about who Jesus is and what the Bible teaches?
 - b) Have my actions been changing to become more and more like Christlike?
- 2) Have I surrendered my life to the Lordship of Christ, trusting Him to be my one and only Savior?
- 3) Does my giving reflect the kind of sacrifice that God calls me to?