

## “The Church is a Loving People”

John 17:22

Sunday May 20, 2018

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This morning we continue our series called The Church Is from the prayer of Jesus from John 17. He prayed for us, for what we as the church would be. We looked his prayer that we would live as the people of God, people of joy, a people of the Word of truth, a people who are sent, and are one. This morning we consider that Jesus prays that the Church is a People of Love.

On Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate that the Spirit of God has been poured out on us to produce what Jesus prays and promises. So what is it to be a people of love?

Hear Jesus’s prayer from John 17, beginning in v. 22,

The glory that you have given me I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one, 23, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. V.26, I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

A couple years ago the Smith family performed the American pilgrimage to Orlando, but rather than worshipping in the land of Mickey, we went to Universal, to the realm of Harry Potter. It was the children’s Christmas present to go on this trip, and boy did we have fun. The way Universal has recreated Hogwarts School and Diagon Alley, a major city center from the stories, is just tremendous. You walk down the streets and simply feel transported to that world.

Yet along with the joy, there was a bit of disappointment. One particular place our family wanted to visit comes from the books: Fred and George Weasley’s joke shop. We’ve all imagined what it would be like from the books; we’ve seen it on film. So, in we went...and quickly the bubble burst. For all it’s promise and color and architecture on the outside, when we went in, there wasn’t much to it. There were ladders and staircases to upper floors that didn’t exist. There were doorways that led nowhere. There were windows to rooms that were just paintings of what we’d hoped to experience. The whole place was a façade, dressed up on the outside with glitz and promise, but a bitter disappointment on the inside.

That may describe our lives, too, all too often, especially when we think about being a people of love. The way we look on the outside may be a cleverly built façade, intending to cover up the emptiness on the inside. The way we talk about it may betray a deep lack of it in reality.

### What is it like to be a people of love as Jesus prayed?

#### How have we been loved?

When I began to study this passage in depth for today, I was considering the point of comparison Jesus was making that we read from John 13:34, that is, just as I have loved you, so you love one another. But that’s not exactly what Jesus prays in John 17. Look more closely. 17:23...so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you have loved me. Notice the point of comparison is the love of the Father for Jesus, the love within the three members of the Trinity. The way the Father sent and loved the Son is what Jesus prays we know. Let me say it a little differently: Jesus prays we know we are invited into the type of love God the Father has for God the Son and God the Spirit. Whoa!

Specifically, Jesus prays we see the love they have for one another **overflows** into the sending Jesus to pursue a people to invite into that relationship of life-giving love. The love of Father for Son overflows out in order to draw us in. But let’s not lose the shock. The Father, Son, and Spirit are perfect. We are not; we are sinners. There is nothing about this love that is deserved by us! We are sinners and rebels drawn into the love of God. Or as John says it in his letter, 1 John 4:9 In this the love of God was made manifest (made visible) among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. The demonstration of the love of God was set on display, made into a public act, carried out among human beings, fallen and sinful human beings. The Spirit makes our dead hearts alive and joins us in union with Jesus. The love flows out, and invites a return of the harvest of nations. This is amazing. Jesus prays that we truly

understand what love is, by asking that we grasp that love that he and the Father have for one another that showed up in his taking on human flesh to offer us life.

One theologian as defined God's love in this way: "his self-giving affection for his image-bearing creatures and his unselfish concern for their well-being, that leads him to act on their behalf for their happiness and welfare."<sup>1</sup>

The very definition of love is self-giving, not because God was lonely and needed a creation or a people to love. He had perfect love within himself already. He doesn't need us to have an object of affection. He has himself. But, the very definition of love is that he gives himself, extends himself, draws us into that love by sending Jesus to take on flesh, suffer all the indignities of this world of sin and sickness, of abuse and pain, of accusation and attack, then go to a cross and be subjected to death itself, be raised from the stench of death and condemnation SO THAT we know what love truly is!

The cost of that self-giving affection, and unselfish concern for sinners and rebels like you and me, is that Jesus acted! He took on flesh and was crucified for us as an act of love to rescue us at the cost of his own life! In Jesus's love and giving of himself, handing over himself to judgment for us, we are reconciled to God, restored to right relationship with him through faith.

The love of the Father for the Son for the Spirit overflows into YOUR life to offer his forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ who was crucified in YOUR place. Do you feel unloved today? There is no higher dignity offered to rebels and sinners. Do you want to be loved like that! I do.

If you feel alone today or ignored or abandoned. If you feel forgotten by God, or unimportant. Remember what Jesus prayed we see. The love we have received is the overflowing love the Father has for Jesus himself. You are cherished more deeply than we could possibly fathom.

### How are we to love?

Jesus's prayer takes the next step to say just as he was sent in love, so also we are sent to have OUR love overflow to invite the world around us inside to a relationship of love to share! What does that look like?

Classically we look at love from 1 Cor 13. Hear vs 1-3. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

The list of activity here is impressive. Speaking as an angel, or knowing all about the deep things of God, or have faith in God to do the seemingly impossible are all amazing things, even submitting my life to martyrdom—giving my all for God. What church would not want to see that manifested in its midst? What could possibly be wrong?

The problem is that all these things could be present and amount to nothing. Our lives can appear so good, right, filled with God's success on the outside, yet completely empty on the inside. We can stir the hearts of men and women, dazzle them with incredible knowledge and teaching and it all be worthless without love. Like a clanging gong or cymbal. All noise and no substance without love. Or say it this way, we can win the arguments and lose the people. Have you ever seen it? Done it?

What Paul is forcing us to see is that it is not merely the WHAT, the external results, that reveal the hand of the love of God at work. Rather it is the HOW we do these things, the character formed in and through his servants demonstrates God at work. How can we see that character? Look at the next verses and put your own name in every place you read love, and see if it rings true.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Redeemer* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1987), 336 as cited in John Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), p. 414.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. How did we do?

Let's pick out just one, v. 5, love is not resentful, or as the NIV translates it, love keeps no record of wrongs, that is no record every selfish or evil thing another person does then seek ways of making them pay for it, either in retribution or cold shoulder treatment. The words draw forth the image of accounting. I'm very thankful for our business office at Central. Lisa keeps track of giving to the church, of expenses for ministry and generally keeps all of us staff in line. We must match what goes out against what comes in. That's just solid accounting.

But it is a terrible way to attempt relationships. Keeping a record of wrongs assures everything gets repaid. Every lack of kindness returned. It is difficult to establish and build loving trusting relationships if we are preoccupied with making sure that if you hurts me, I must pay you back. If someone damages my reputation, I must damage theirs. If someone takes from me something I really want, then they must feel the pain of loss that I felt. If you don't do what I want, then I'll make you pay. That is NOT love.

We have not been loved that way. The way we read vs 4-7 in English describes qualities of love. But the original Greek are all verbs. Love acts, as we saw before. Here Paul says, love bears patiently. Love acts kindly. Love does not envy is literally "strives not," or "exerts not "itself. Love "heaps praise not"; love puffs not self. In a sense Paul is personifying love, ascribing to it behaviors of a person. Why? Because these speak of a character exercised, and they describe the character of Jesus and how he loves us!

The love the Father, Son and Spirit for one another overflows toward us and is made visible in the Incarnation. As in v. 4. Jesus leaving his throne above to take on flesh, being born in the dirt is not striving to assert itself. Leaving heaven to live among us as one of us is not heaping praise on himself, not puffing himself up. He patiently bore our live and did not resent leaving his throne in heaven. The word kind speaks to being merciful and loving as Jesus loved us when we rebelled against him; he loves us still when we rebel now. He bears patiently with us on the cross, not counting our sins against us, but instead taking them on himself. His love covers over sin with gracious love, willing to forgive at the cost of his own blood. It endures, like one who labors on in spite of difficulty. The love Jesus has for us is tenacious; it pursues us to the dark parts of our hearts, knowing and forgiving all those things we desperately try and keep hidden. If you are looking to be fully known, and loved, then the ONLY place you will find it is in Jesus.

And yet, by the work of the Spirit he molds us to be like that. Love promotes an environment where the welfare of others is a primary concern. Loving as we've been loved by Jesus looks like a willingness to lay aside our preferences in order to benefit another. It looks like rather than stomping away in offense when someone says something offensive, it seeks to forgive and pursue anyway. It looks like refusing to jump to conclusions, but instead is longsuffering, patient and listening to another. Love looks to see joy in another's eyes as its own joy. Love seeks the smile on another face rather than our own when we get our way. Love seeks in kindness not to attack those who disagree, or punish them with our anger, but instead offers them kindness and gentleness. **Boy do I need the Lord to transform the way I parent my kids into that!**

Our love for one another should be a taste, an appetizer, or the love of Jesus for them! The way the world and our neighbors are going to experience Jesus here, the way we have a Christian life that is not empty, hollow, a façade, is to ask Jesus to show us how to give away to others the love we've received from him.

So let's live as a people who don't invite a world to a shell house, a façade Diagon Alley with no substance. Instead, let each of us live as those who extend the very love of God into a world in desperate need. May the world *feel* it from us.