

Greater Love

John 15:12-17

Look around the room this morning and realize that most of us would not even know each other if it were not for Christ. I would never have met my wife, Rita, if it were not for Christ. We met at Bible College, as a result of the fact that we had each made a commitment to follow Jesus wherever He might lead us while we were in high school. It was the ministry that brought us to Monrovia and so it is fair to say that we would not know anyone here if it were not for Christ. He has brought us into your life and there is no other explanation for why this is so. But this is also largely true of your experience here in the church with one another. For the most part, we all only know each other because we have been drawn to this church by the Lord through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. There are a very few exceptions. Some have met and married before coming to know Christ but, of these, many might confess that they are still married or even got married because of Christ. Some of us are family in the natural sense, brothers, sisters, parents, children, cousins, grandparents, etc. Even where these relationships were formed independent of your coming to Christ, the fact that you now belong to Christ brings an added dimension, a transformative factor, to an already existing relationship.

The relationships we experience in our church family are in many ways similar to our relationships with our natural family. We know each other with varying degrees of familiarity. Some, we know intimately and others possibly only superficially. This is true of both kinds of family. In our family, we have Elizabeth, who will continue to live with us until 19 or twenty-something. We have Jeff, who still lives in Monrovia, Peter and family in Riverside, and our other 4 children live in Washington, Colorado, Minnesota, and New York. Rita is away this weekend spending time with Virginia and family in Washington. But, you know, she spends more time with you than she does with them. We spend more time with you than with any of our children with the exception of Elizabeth who has to grow up before she can leave us like the rest of them.

Rita's brother, Daniel, hosts the annual family reunion at his home in Linden, CA. Rita's California siblings faithfully attend as well as her cousins from Orland, CA. But Dan also invites many of his church friends to the event. This is natural since these are the people he is actually living his life with. The church people at the event may even outnumber the relatives. On a day to day basis, they are much closer to him than we are. Just as you are much closer to us than he is. This is the nature of the lives we live in Christ as we fellowship with one another in the church.

The first word that we read from our passage was the command of Jesus that we "love one another as I have loved you..." My point is that this is true. We have been loving each other as (since Jesus is the instigator) He has loved us. Our love for each other which is real and palpable would not exist if it were not for Christ. So, we should begin our thinking in respect to this command with an acknowledgement of the degree to which we are keeping this command. This is a witness to us of His grace and His presence in our lives. He has commanded us to love each other and we do.

But, as much as this is true, there is more. The "as I have loved you" speaks beyond the fact of our love to the quality of our love. Simple meditation on the character of Jesus' love for us will demonstrate steps that we can take to deepen our church family love so that it looks more like His love for us.

Jesus' love is eternal. He has always loved us and He always will.

Jesus' love is specific and individual. Yes, God so loved the world... but Jesus raised Lazarus not just to show that He could, but also out of love for His friends, Mary and Martha. He loved the thief He died with and blind Bartimaeus and the disciples whom He loved and Zacchaeus and the list goes on. In each case, Jesus did the one thing for the loved one that was most needed, most important.

Jesus' love drove His priorities. He was in a hurry to get to Galilee but the stop for lunch in Sychar became a three day delay because He loved the people there and He needed to secure their faith. He had compassion on the multitudes and healed and taught and poured Himself out for them to the point beyond

exhaustion as a habit of ministry. He did not use His disciples, He loved them. He gave Himself to them.

Jesus lived everything Paul preached. "Love suffers long and is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil. Does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth. Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails..."

But most of all, Jesus loves us to salvation, giving to us the one gift we need above all others - salvation! Eternal life! And this gift required the sacrifice of His own life on the cross.

"Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down one's life for His friends."

"Love one another as I have loved you... Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

John connected these two thoughts specifically in his letter to the churches, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." What does it look like when believers live this way?

Look around and you can see it. We see families bringing children into their homes and raising them as their own. We see friends sharing the little that they have in order to be there for another. We see time and energy given without regard for their cost. We see the examples of faithfulness that we should take to heart and value for what they teach.

This is not to say that we have made it, no, we have a long ways to go. But we should see clearly that Jesus is here. He is among us and he is helping us to become all that He is calling us to be.

What's next? Answer this. Where you have stepped out on order to give the love of Christ, have you regretted doing so? Have you found the giving of that love to be more than you can bear? Who would say, "I loved her in Jesus' name but I shouldn't have?" To love with His love is its own reward. It is pure and holy and

honest and sincere. When you love this way then you have the sense that "I was made for this."

And there is more, for there are more people out there who need the Savior. Remember the deepest need of the people in your life. It is salvation. It is the new life that we can only have through Christ. We would not be here if it weren't for Him. We would not know each other if it weren't for Him. We could not love if it weren't for Him. He is in it all.

"By this we know love, because he laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."