

"The Glory of Love"

Home

You've probably heard that old phrase, "Home is where the heart is." That's pretty much true isn't? Think of the places where you feel at home: is it just the place or is it the people and memories that make it home? Mothers' Day reminds us that Moms do a lot to make a home for us.

Much of the message of the Bible is about humans finding their true home. There's the obvious story of Moses leading the children of Israel through the desert to their new home in the land of Caanan. Throughout their history the people of Israel, including the kings, were reminded by God's prophets that their true home was with God. It became more focused when Jesus came upon the scene. As the son of God he called people to be with himself, and together they formed a family – God's family. Ever since His disciples have found their home with him as they prepare for their true home in heaven. His disciples also invite others to join his family.

Scripture records these words of Jesus, "Those who love (αγαπε) me will keep my word, and my Father will love (αγαπε) them, and *we* will come to them and make *our* home with them" (John 14:23). Jesus makes a home for us when we love him by keeping his word. And our true home in heaven begins to unfold today: "...*we* will come to them and make *our* home with them;" meaning Jesus and God our Father will dwell with us as was originally intended (in the Garden of Eden) and as will be the case when the heavenly kingdom is complete (pictured in Revelation).

Love

We heard that word again this morning in the Scripture reading: "love." What does it mean? We've heard it and used it so often so often that one wonders if it's meaning has become confused, unless it is explained. What does it mean for a mother to love her child? What does it mean for a husband to love his wife? **What does it mean when we talk of God's love?** What did Jesus mean when he told his disciples to love one another?

So often we reduce love to sentimentality; a soft, warm, and maybe indulgent feeling. Sometimes we think love should be an anesthetic, keeping all pain at a distance, so that to love one another we avoid conflict and don't talk about things that might be painful.

What does love really mean? In this passage from John the word "love" used is that Greek word αγαπε. You remember how I explained this several of weeks ago when we read from the Gospel of John where the risen Jesus asked Peter "Do you love me?" He asked if he loved with "αγαπε" love; that self-sacrificing, divine-like love that Jesus exemplified. In today's reading Jesus uses that word for love again, saying that those who love him with that kind of love, the Father will love them in the same manner, and will come to live with them.

Αγαπε love, that's a tough kind of love. Good moms love us like Jesus does – that αγαπε kind of love that is willing to sacrifice herself for her children. Some years back, on the nightly news, a report was given on the food shortages in what was then the Soviet Union. The woman being interviewed had been standing in line for hours outside a grocery store. She was simply dressed in an old cloth coat with a scarf tied around her head. She hoped to get a few loaves of bread and some milk that day. However, it was growing late and the chances were increasingly slim that there would be any bread left. She expressed her fear to the TV reporter that the crowd would turn ugly. There had been rioting in Moscow before, and there could be again. The news reporter asked her why she stayed in the crowd. Her translated reply was simple: "I have children to take care of."<sup>1</sup>

Feelings may accompany αγαπε, but are not the same as αγαπε. **God expects us to demonstrate agape love even when we don't feel like it.** Sometimes we demonstrate agape, not because we feel like it, but because we know it is the right thing to do, and so ask the Holy Spirit to be in us. The irony is this: agape love begins with a response, an act of obedience, and ends with a feeling – feeling the joy that God's love can bring. Those who give of themselves in agape because of the need of others often experience joy not found by indulging their own desires. Moms know all about this – although some of you may still be looking for the joy that supposed to come with raising your kids. Maybe the joy will come when your kids reach age 30. That's when you start to regain your intelligence and they begin to be grateful for what you've done on their behalf. [I have seen joy on mission trips: people give up the comforts and conveniences of home to offer their hands to someone in need. Joy results.]

Christ's love is cross-shaped and includes pain. Love and glorifying God isn't about avoiding friction and pain, but about not giving up on one another even in the midst of friction and pain. Yet neither is love all about

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<sup>1</sup> AUGSBURG SERMONS 3, (Augsburg, Minneapolis: Gospels, Series C, 1994) by Jeannette F. Strandjord, 34.

pain and friction. There is great power and joy found in genuine love – the kind of love that God gives and asks of us.

It's not really a sentimental thing – sacrifice never really is. Generally speaking it's pretty hard to sacrifice our own preferences for the needs of others – unless we really have a strong connection with them. Is it as hard to put aside our preferences to love Jesus? What is the top priority around here? His word still stands, "Those who love (agape) me will keep my word, and my Father will love (agape) them."

## The Gifts of Love and Home

Home and love provide us invaluable gifts for living a true life. The first gift is sure guidance. When home and love are as they should be each person is set on the right path in life. We know that the home is where the life path begins – our prisons are filled with people who did not have the blessing of a good home. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father sends in the name of Jesus, will provide sure guidance for us in our home with other believers. The Holy Spirit, Jesus promises, will teach us everything and remind us of all that Jesus has said – so that as his people, and as his church, we will stay on the right path. (Maybe a little like your mom's voice whispering in your ear when you are tempted to do something you know isn't right, "We don't do that in our home.").

The second gift that Jesus promises those who love him is peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." Jesus is offering an inner peace that comes with the assurance that we are loved by someone who is willing to sacrifice for us.

The Bible speaks of the vital relationship between peace and the soul. The Greek word in the Bible for "peace" is εἰρήνη, which means "peace of mind, tranquility." That's the word Jesus uses here. Simply said, simply defined, simply found. Job is a great example of one who experienced terrible calamity in life, yet remained steadfast in his faith in God. Why? He had peace in his soul. Abraham was able to live out his faith in God. Why? He had peace in his soul. Jesus was able to fulfill his divine calling because He had peace in his soul. You and I will fulfill God's call for us when we have peace in our souls. God's peace is paramount to spiritual, mental, and emotional wholeness.

We cannot create peace in our own souls. It is not a package picked up here and there, bought or sold, nor does it come as a partner to intellect, talent, or sensitivity. So how is peace simply found? Here's the key: we cannot experience the peace of God until we have peace with God. And perhaps that is the source of so much strife in the world: people do not have peace with God in their souls. [Peace is a disposition of God's heart, and this same peace is applied to the hearts of believers.] Through Jesus, humans have been reconciled to God. In Him we have peace with God and as we love Jesus we will find the peace that comes from a loving God.

These two - **sure and certain guidance and inner peace - are the greatest gifts we can receive or give through our homes.** They mirror the good things that God gives to those who love him and keep his word.

Now, like those to whom the apostle John wrote this gospel reciting Jesus' words, we also recognize that we do not love Jesus, the Son of God our Savior, as we should, and therefore the full measure of the good gifts from God is still to come. This is the "not yet" aspect of the kingdom of God of which I spoke last week. In this "in between time" Jesus still says to us, "Those who love me will keep my word..." Didn't he also say, "Love one another as I have loved you?"

## The 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment

James Ussher was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1581. He was educated at Trinity College and became one of the leading scholars of his time. He was a collector of books and amassed the largest library in Western Europe. In 1625, he was appointed Archbishop of Armagh. [He is best remembered today for a chronology of the Bible where he determined that the universe was created on October 23, 4004 B.C.]

Once while traveling, he was shipwrecked on the coast of Ireland. Cold and destitute, he came to the home of a clergyman. He asked the man for clothes and food, but the man was leery in giving Ussher any help. Trying to catch an imposter, he quizzed Ussher, "How many commandments are there?"

"I can at once satisfy you that I am not the ignorant imposter you take me for, there are eleven," replied Ussher.

"No, there are only ten in my Bible," criticized the man. "Tell me, what is the eleventh and I will help you."

Opening the Scripture, Ussher pointed to John 13:34: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Keeping to the 11<sup>th</sup> commandment may seem like a heavy charge – for who can love with an agape kind of love? The answer is: *we* can, with the help of the Holy Spirit. One pastor tells about the time the children's sermon was about things we can and cannot do: when we can do things ourselves, when we must call on family, and when on God. He asked, "What things are we able to do ourselves?" Several answers were offered: "See,"

"Hear," "Talk," "Walk." And when I asked, "What things can't we do?" the first answer was, "We can't fly except with airplanes and helicopters." The second answer was, "We can't eat dirt. Our mommies won't let us."<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes the Holy Spirit tells us what we can't do, but more often provides the power to do what is right. Jesus is not commanding us to a feeling, but to an action of the Holy Spirit in our lives. For a child to be loved it is important that Mom say, "I love you." It's equally important, though, that she kiss the hurt, wipe the tear, and give a hug. Action is important.

Gerald Sittser has written a helpful book called, "Love One Another, Becoming the Church Jesus Longs For."<sup>3</sup> In it he explains what it means to obey the "11<sup>th</sup> Commandment" through reference to other passages in the Bible. Christians are called to action to: welcome one another; be subject to one another; forbear one another; forgive one another, confess sin to and pray for one another; serve one another; encourage one another; bear one another's burdens; stir one another up; admonish one another. Doing all those things is what it means to love one another with an agape kind of love.

I believe we can trust our Lord to show us how to love one another and even how to love Him. God's passion for love can guide us even when our passions run high, and our energy runs low. For God is glorified when Christ rules our minds and hearts and actions. **Our glory is in Christ's love through us.**

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<sup>2</sup>Melvin E. Schroer and Angelo J. Mongiore, A FUNNY THING HAPPENED, (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), 4.

<sup>3</sup>Gerald Sittser, Love One Another, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.