

**Alpha and Omega: Lord of the Present II  
Loving One Another and Extending His Love**

*Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, Rev. 1:4.* For several weeks I have been talking about a Savior who is for all times: past, present, future. Last week I spoke about the Lord of the present and how we can walk with the Timeless One in our present time. So, Pastor Richard, last week you said that the “present” is— what were the words? – “a very thin slice of time.” If that’s true, why are you giving us another sermon on this topic “the present?” If it’s so thin, why are you making it thicker?

Like so many things in life, “the present” is in short supply and so its value is high. Something as valuable as our present is worth giving a little more attention to. Today, the present is the only time we have that we can do anything with. The past is out of our hands. The future isn’t here yet. But in the present we can make choices that impact our lives and all those around us. The present is the only time we have to turn to God. *I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation, 2 Corinthians 6:2.* You see, Christ was resurrected in the midst of all earthly concerns and so He is with us in the present and the choices we make today impact everything that follows.

## **COMMANDING OUR PRESENT**

Last week I talked about how Jesus gave his disciples clear directions on how we are to be about godly living in the present time. He gave us a great commandment: to love God with all we have. *For in him we live and move and have our being, Acts 17:28.* So, don’t respond to God’s whole-hearted love for you in a half-hearted manner.

Then He gave us the great compassion: love our neighbors as much as He does – both good and the bad people. Until we love God as we should, we will find it very difficult to love our neighbor as we could. That doesn’t mean we condone bad behavior in people, but we can do our best to love them, as sinners like us in need of God’s grace and salvation. Now let’s consider some implications of His command and compassion.

### **1. Love One Another**

Now when we talk about loving God and neighbor let’s be clear that the kind of love we’re talking about is not romantic emotion. We’re talking about awareness of others, caring ... even to the point of sacrificing for others. That’s the godly kind of love we’re talking about.

We can talk about loving our neighbor and then put our dollars and sometimes our hand to helping those less fortunate than ourselves. That’s fine. But how are doing in terms of practicing the love of Jesus within our own church family? That’s where the rubber meets the road. In the final hours, as He met with the disciples, Jesus gave them these instructions on the matter of love: *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another, John 13:34-35.*

Love one another in the household of God ... sometimes easier said than done. But that's where loving your neighbor begins. If we can learn to love those in the household of God, those who share our faith in Jesus, Savior and Life-transformer, then we'll be better equipped to love our neighbors more than superficially. Church is where we practice caring for those whom we did not choose and loving one another even when we do not like one another. Think of it this way: we do not get to choose our brothers and sisters. So it is in God's family, the Church. Therefore, *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love*, Eph. 4:2. For if we cannot learn to love one another as Jesus first loved us how can we love a neighbor who is not of God's household?

Just how seriously did Jesus mean this? Here's what He said: *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you ... You are my friends if you do what I command*, John 15:12,14. I found the phrase "love one another" used 19 times in the N. T. always addressed to believers in Christ. In fact, early reports of Christians in the Roman Empire mentioned how they loved one another. *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*, John 13:35. In addition to the home, the church ought to be the place where genuine Christian love is practiced.

I know it doesn't always work out that way. We're broken, sinful creatures ... like a bunch of porcupines huddling together to keep warm on a cold night. The church isn't a museum of saints, already perfected in Christ's love. We're a hospital for sinners, still being healed by Jesus, even as we assist one another in getting well from our "sickness unto death" – which is sin.

We don't have to like everyone to love them. Remember, last week how I said love is a choice we make. We choose to do right by others, even when we don't feel like it. *God has loved us first, and out of His abundant love we will find the resources to love one another*, 1 John 4:19. Now there's a thought! Did you ever think about allowing the One who says, "I am with you always," to come into your situation to help you?

The person who has embraced resurrection, who knows he's a sinner and has repented and been forgiven, he/she is the one who is willing to obey Jesus in all he commands. *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law*, Romans 13:8.

## 2. Extend His Love

It begins in the household of God but doesn't stay just here. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*, John 3:16. There's hardly a Christian that doesn't know that verse. God's love is so big that He sent Jesus for everyone in the whole wide world!

Here's where the Great Commission comes in. Because God so loved the world, ... Jesus came to them and said, *"... Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you..."* Matt. 28:18-20. For two thousand years these words of Jesus have been a charter, a foundation, and a blueprint for the movement that His followers have spread worldwide. For us, though, it seems a hard commandment. Indeed, it is. Still, He says to us, *As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you*, John 20:21. How did the Father send Him? He sent Him with grace

and truth and with power – the power to do all He was sent to do. Likewise He sends us out with His power, if we will but avail ourselves of Him. Did He not say, *My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness*, 2 Cor. 12:9?

Love God, love our neighbor, love one another and extend His love: this we have as our purpose in these present days.

## **PURPOSE IN OUR DAYS**

### **1. Cultivating the Mundane.**

The Methodist movement grew around practices to help people live with God daily. Daily Bible reading, praying throughout the day, attending church every Sunday, and meeting weekly in their small group, was a design to keep them in tune with God in this thin slice of time we call the present. That's what I've tried to emphasize here. Those Christian disciplines are more valuable than ever. Oh that people would realize this!

We all want life to have meaning, we want fulfillment, healing and even ecstasy. But the human paradox is that we find these things by starting where we are, not where we wish we were. Look for blessings in unlikely, everyday places – and not in spectacular events. It is in the ordinary, the here and now, that God asks us to recognize that the creation is indeed refreshed like dew-laden grass that is renewed in the morning, Psalm. 90:5. In personal terms this means that ... *inwardly we are being renewed day by day*, 2 Cor. 4:16.<sup>1</sup>

People are very much taken in my instant results, exciting, glittering events and activities ... and celebrities. Oh yes, there are celebrities even in church circles, just as there are in entertainment and politics. The problem with celebrities is that people want to place all their hopes and expectations for a better life on them, or they live through them vicariously. But that's no way to grow your soul. It's really no way to live. Celebrities are ordinary sinners like you and me. They just appear to have exciting and rewarding lives. Maybe they do, maybe they don't. And yet, there is an exciting and rewarding life awaiting you. It is found in following Jesus – seriously.

While we see the immediate, God is working from an eternal perspective. When we avail ourselves of His active presence, then even our mundane and routine tasks can take on tremendous significance *I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father*, John 14:12. You can be part of a world-wide quest to redeem people from darkness and bring them into the light; to free people from slavery and bring them into freedom. How? By entering God's service; slow down your hurried quest for significance and ask God to show you where and how to serve Him.

Here's a little story that indicates why we need direction. A university freshman was about to have her first blind date. Her roommate was making all the arrangements and asked whether she preferred Southern boys or Northern boys. A Midwesterner, she was innocently unaware of such subtle distinctions and asked what the difference was.

Her worldly-wise roommate answered, "Southern boys are more romantic. They will take you walking in the moonlight and whisper sweet nothings in your ear. Northern boys are more active. They like to go places and do exciting things."

The girl pondered the contrast and then asked wistfully, "Could you please find me a Southern boy from as far North as possible?"

Isn't that the way? We want things our way ... why can't I have it all? But life on earth is life in the making. Every day involves choices, frequent conflicts, and unknown outcomes. As we choose, we need to ask two questions: Does my choice offer meaning beyond today – beyond momentary gratification? Will results be good for others as well as for myself?"

## **2. Company In Troubling Times**

I may not see Him face to face in days of trouble, but I know He has already won the victory over all that evil and death can throw at me. That's why I'm on the winning team. Not only that, He brings people into our lives during dark times to lift us, help us along, provide for us, and pray for us. That's part of what He meant about loving one another. Christ is our light shining in the darkness. The darkness is still here but we have His light to show us the way.

God does not send the pain and turmoil. But He can develop us in the midst of it all. Here's what the apostle James says: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of our faith develops perseverance, James 1:2-3.* Are you kidding me? Rejoice in my troubles? Who does that? Yet, when you realize that problems in life are inevitable, unpredictable, and yet purposeful, then, then you can rejoice, because you trust the Lord to get you through and build you up. *The testing of your faith develops perseverance, ... so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything, James 1:3b-4.* In the Lord you will find courage to keep on, for in your problems faith is purified, patience is fortified, your character is sanctified. Through all the struggles and difficulties, disappointments and despair, God is working toward the ultimate purpose for your life, as He shapes you more and more in the image of Christ. God never gives up on you. Don't give up on Him.

## **ALWAYS WITH US**

Each Sunday we pray the Lord's Prayer, saying, "Give us this day our daily bread." Our Lord tells us to pray for today, and so He prevents us from tormenting ourselves about tomorrow. It is as if [God] were to say to us: "[It is I] who gives you this day [and] will also give you what you need for this day. [It is I] who makes the sun to rise. [It is I] who scatters the darkness of night and reveals to you the rays of the sun."<sup>iii</sup>

After His resurrection, as Jesus prepared to return to heaven He told His disciples – and I believe He's speaking to us as well - *... surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age, Matt. 28:20.* He is with us in every time, all time, and to the end of time.

He's here today and today is the day of salvation - tomorrow is the day of judgment. Won't you come to Him today? Today, we can surrender our lives fully to Jesus Christ. Today, we can step out in faith to accomplish great things for God. Today is God's day for you, and He has provided all you need. You can't do anything about your past, you must wait for tomorrow to arrive, but you can do something with today. Don't ever let your life get stuck in regret over a yesterday, or a fear about tomorrow. Live your life today, and do your best to love God, love your neighbor, love one another, and extend His love with your every breath. You are laying the foundation for tomorrow.

*...for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light... Ephesians 5:8.*

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<sup>i</sup>Kathleen Norris, *The Quotidian Mysteries*, (Paulist Press, 1998, New York, NY) 12, 22.

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<sup>ii</sup>Dunnam, *Perceptions*, "As Far North As Possible" 33.

<sup>iii</sup>Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 395 a.d.), *On the Lord's Prayer*.