

“THE SHARING OF LOVE”

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4th SUNDAY IN ADVENT

TEXT: EPHESIANS 2:11-18

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 2:8-14

I – WHAT DOES LOVE MEAN?:

In the last couple of years I have received the same e-mail from various sources. Most recently I think it was forwarded to me by someone outside this congregation and I read it again. It says that a group of professional people posed this question to a group of 4 to 8 year olds: “What does love mean?” It then gives a list of some of the more profound and funny answers. As I read it again I took note of the answer that 7 year old Bobby gave. He stated that “Love is what’s in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.”

I thought about this statement long and hard, and then I closed my eyes and remembered the sounds of Christmas past. I remembered opening presents with my brothers and sister in my parents home, surrounded by them and my grandparents. I remembered the sounds of Christmas mornings spent in my own home with my own children, and more recently I remember the sounds made by grandchildren as they sat around the tree and open presents. It’s easy to remember the sound of ripping paper and popping flashbulbs. I remember the sound of breakfast cooking in the kitchen. I remember the Christmas songs on records, then tapes, and now on CD’s being played on the stereo. I remember the sounds of children screaming, “It’s just what I wanted.”

What I remember most is the sound of love. The sound of familiar voices as they shared the love of Christmas with one another as they showed it by giving gifts. The sounds of joy, hope, and happiness shared because those in the room knew without a doubt that they were loved by their parents, grandparents, and siblings.

II – LOVE IS TO BE SHARED:

I think we hear the sound of love loudest during this time of year because there is so much sharing during the holiday season. We can ignore some of our family the rest of the year, but at Christmas our hearts warm and we have a need to share our love with them through cards,

gifts, phone calls, over meals, and just visiting. I think love is loudest when it's being shared, because you can't love without the act of sharing.

If you look up the definition of love the dictionary one of the definitions says it is: "a very strong affection: an intense feeling of tender affection and compassion." The definition itself tells you that love is something which must be shared. The affection has to be towards something or someone doesn't it? Compassion is something we feel towards something or someone else. Love is not an emotion we keep to ourselves; it's an emotion that drives us to share with others. When I have compassion on someone I reach out to them in love. When I have genuine affection for someone I reach out to them in love. Love is to be shared with others!

The Christmas story drives this point home. God modeled it for us at the birth of his one and only Son in a stable that first Christmas night. The baby born to Mary was the Son of God; he was the Messiah that the people had been told about for hundreds of years. It was the Savior the people had been promised and expected. Finally God's plan for sharing his love with the world was put into place and Jesus was born. The first thing we read after the fact that Jesus was born is the fact that the birth was shared. God's love was shared. The shepherds were in the fields minding the sheep, just another night on duty, when an angel appeared and gave them the birth announcement. Told them where to find and how to recognize this gift of love. God wanted to make sure the love was shared so this one angel was joined by the armies of heavenly angels who shared the announcement of love by singing.

III – TEXT – EPHESIANS 2:11-18:

The baby in the manger was never once meant to be a secret. Jesus was not sent to be hoarded by one group of people, or to offer God's love to a select few. Jesus was sent to share God's love and model God's love for the whole world. Not only was he sent to save us from our sins, he was sent to bring us all together into the family of God. He was sent to use love to tear down barriers that prevent us from loving one another. He came to teach us to share love.

Paul points this out in this morning's text taken from his letter to the church at Ephesus. I'm reading to you this morning from "The Message" translation of the Bible...

Ephesians 2:11 - 18 (TMSG)

11 But don't take any of this for granted. It was only yesterday that you outsiders to God's ways 12 had no idea of any of this, didn't know the first thing about the way God works, hadn't the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God's covenants and promises in Israel, hadn't a clue about what God was doing in the world at large. 13 Now because of Christ—dying that death, shedding that blood—you who were once out of it

altogether are in on everything. 14 The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. 15 He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody. 16 Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. 17 Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. 18 He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.

At the time Jesus was born there were two groups of people as far as the religious leaders were concerned. There were Jews and there was everybody else! Everyone else was a gentile, a non-believer, a pagan, or as one translation puts it, "uncircumcised heathens." The Jews considered themselves to be the chosen people of God and kept God to themselves. They worried only about their own race and didn't care if the whole rest of the world was going to hell, matter of fact they hoped they were. The gentiles hadn't rejected God, they just didn't know anything about him, had never been told about who he was or what wonderful things he could do.

Then came Jesus and the walls which had been erected to keep the Jews and gentiles separated came tumbling down. Jesus offered the love of God to everyone on earth. Jesus did away with the status quo and spread the Good News to all he came into contact with. Jesus brought the love of God and shared it with everyone. All people were now God's chosen, and all people could be a child of God.

Jesus sacrificed his life on a cross as a symbol of God's love and did it publicly so all the world would know, so all the world could find themselves surrounded in the loving forgiveness of God at the foot of that cross. It's through the blood of Jesus that we all become the same, no longer chosen or unchosen, only believer or non-believer. The love of God is shared equally with everyone and everyone can be filled with God's Holy Spirit.

I love the statement in the text that after Jesus tore down walls and did away with barriers, "Then He Started Over." It should be obvious what a change occurred on the day of his sacrifice. It started a new era, a new Kingdom, and a new love. We went from B.C. to A.D. It was so important we keep track of all of history using the death on the cross as our reference point. I guess love's pretty strong when it's shared.

IV – COMMANDED TO SHARE:

If you profess to be a Christian, sharing the love of Jesus with one another is not an option, it's a command. Before his death Jesus told his disciples he had a new command for them to follow, that command was to "love one another just as I have loved you." Jesus loved us to the point of a cross; we are supposed to love one another in the same way. And the one another isn't just those inside the faith community, it's those outside in the whole community. After his death and resurrection he gave the great commission that his disciples should go into all the world and spread the Good News to everyone. The church of Jesus Christ has survived because the followers of Jesus have carried out these commands for the last 2,000 years. They have shared the love of God, through the love of Christ with others who have embraced the Good News.

The church nationwide started to decline 60 some years ago because it became a closed society who only shared the love of Jesus with the ones in the Faith Community. They did not tear down walls and remove barriers and share it with everyone as Jesus calls us to do. I believe one of the reasons we have seen such growth in this church is because we are actively sharing the love with others. Through collecting for the community food and clothing pantry, through collecting for adopt a family Christmas, through helping others even have a Christmas, through raising funds and sending a mission outreach to Flat Rock, through donating to the Pastor's discretionary fund to help those needing emergency assistance, by supporting BORN through supporting the youth whatever they do, and through inviting and welcoming anyone to the church you are sharing the love.

My question for you this day is "WILL YOU CONTINUE TO SHARE THE LOVE, AND WILL YOU LOOK FOR NEW WAYS TO SHARE THE LOVE?"

V – KEEP SHARING:

We are called to share the love. Think of it this way: I SERVE JESUS WHEN I SHARE JESUS AND I SHARE JESUS WHEN I SHOW JESUS. As the old hymn says – They will know we are Christians by our love.

Let me close by sharing with you another story from the E-mail I received. There was a contest to find the most caring child from a group of stories which had been submitted to the panel. The winner was a four year old child whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing, I just helped him cry."

As Jesus told those he taught and spoke to said...Now go and do likewise.

AMEN