

4.17.2016 Easter 3 (1 Peter 2:17)

There was a group of women gathered at a seminar titled: *How to Live in a Loving Relationship with Your Husband*. The women were asked, "How many of you love your husbands?" All the women raised their hands. Then they were asked, "When was the last time you told your husband you loved him?" Some women said today, some yesterday, and some didn't remember. The women were then told to take out their cell phones and send the following text message to their husband: "I love you, sweetheart." Then the women were told to exchange phones and read the husband's response.

Here are some of the replies:

1. What now? Did you crash the car again?
2. You may dispense with the pleasantries... Just tell me how much you need!
3. Whatever it is... I won't forgive you this time!
4. Am I dreaming?
5. I don't understand what you mean!?!

In our Epistle this morning St. Peter writes: "Love the brotherhood." His command to love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is short and sweet, but do we understand what he means? We live in a culture that doesn't treat the word love with the respect it deserves, and we speak a language where its meaning is batted around like a ping pong ball. As we drive around town we see the word love used on license plate frames and bumper stickers to profess a driver's love for anything and everything from giraffes to bacon. Clearly love is not love. The word love has a very broad meaning in the English language.

We speak of love often and we are so familiar with this language that we quickly discern the difference in meaning when we speak about the different types and ways we love. If however, we had to describe the Christian love of brotherhood that Peter commands in our Epistle to a person with no knowledge of the English language, how would we do it? If I'm using exactly the same word (love), how would I explain the difference between my love for Taco Bell and my love for Ted?

I would suggest the best way to describe that which is so distinct and different about the way a Christian loves his brother is to go straight to the source of love. God knows that we can't give what we don't have, so He sent His one and only Son to give us what we lacked, and it's that sacrificial love so perfectly manifested in His Son that we are called to share with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and with the world He gave His life to save. Consider these three ways that our Savior Christ models authentic Christian love.

His love is freely given.

In the Gospel according to John (10:17-18) we hear Jesus say, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." When we read that "a band of men and officers" came "with lanterns and torches and weapons" to arrest Jesus... (John 18:3) When we hear all the people cry out: "Crucify Him!"... It can lead us to believe that Christ's life was taken by force, but it was not, He surrendered it freely. Jesus didn't give His life on the Cross because He couldn't avoid it, but freely offered His life and His love by placing Himself where the will of the Father would be done.

Though He gives His life and love freely, there is a part of us that wants

to work for it, and then fight to protect what we have claimed as our own. When the men and officers came to arrest Jesus in the garden, Peter took up a sword and began to fight. After he cut the ear off the servant of the high priest, Jesus said to him (Matthew 26:53-54), “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” Like Peter, we struggle, we fight, we work, we pull out all the stops to protect our kingdom and our will, but Jesus shows us that authentic love is not about our will, but “to will the good of another.” (St. Thomas Aquinas) This brings us to our next point:

Love is freely given, but it’s not always easy to love.

Jesus had put Himself in a position not only to give His life for His friends, but for His enemies. St. Paul tells us God’s love was shown to us (Romans 5:8) “in that, we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” And that’s the scandal of the Cross, isn’t it? It’s the great mystery – that God would freely give His life for the guilty. We have seen the Cross, and finally by the grace of God we believe, but how many times did Jesus offer us heaven, only to have us choose hell.

The truth is when Jesus was in agony praying to Father in the Garden the night before He was crucified and His sweat fell like “great drops of blood,” (Luke 22:44) He knew that He would die for many that would reject Him, yet He freely gave His life and His love. “He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2) If your life has been anything like mine, you know how painful it is to love someone that rejects you. Imagine the sorrow and grief that Jesus knew, despised and rejected by so many He came to save. (Isaiah 53:3)

It's not easy to freely give your love to those who don't love you in return, but we are His disciples and that is our Lord's example. He prayed, "Saying, Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42) He asked His Father to remove the cup. It wasn't easy road for the Creator of the Universe, should it be easy for us?

Love is freely given, but it's not always easy to love because:

Love is sacrifice.

Contrary to popular belief, love is not a two way street. Love is not 50/50. You don't get what you give. The Son of God didn't lay down His Cross and meet us at the half-way point. It's been said that one drop of Jesus' blood was enough to pay for the sins of the entire world, but He didn't stop at one drop. He poured out all twelve pints because love is sacrifice. Love doesn't stop at just enough, loves gives all it has – every last drop. The sacrificial way He loves us is the same way He calls us and empowers us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, our spouses, our parents, our children, our friends, and the world. He died for us and He calls us to die for them.

It is only by His grace, His Holy Spirit at work in us, and His perfect example of love that we are able to show His love to the world. His example on the Cross is like a dad watching his kid try again and again, and then at the perfect time, saying, "Step aside and let me show you how it's done!" In His life and by His death He modeled perfect sacrificial love. As the children of God we can either humble ourselves and take a lesson, or like many children do, we can choose to use the freedom He gives us to go our own way.

I love the English language and can't imagine life without this Bible in my hand, but we've clearly lost something in the translation of the word

love. We use it so often and for so many things that it has lost much of the power in its meaning. We can change that... We can be people who say I love you and remember Christ's broken body. We can be people who say I love you and remember that His blood was poured out for us. We can be people who remember that God is love, so each time we say I love you, we are invoking His Holy Name. We can be people who always remember that love is given freely, but it is not easy to love, for love is sacrifice.