

Sermon 2010 Pentecost 5
Text: Galatians 5:1, 13-25
Theme: "Fit and Focused to Love"
6-27-10

Love is a complicated word is it not. I love my wife, I love my house and I love ice cream, but they are quite different loves right? Sometimes love is emotional. Sometimes it expresses an ideal. Sometimes it is just a concern for someone or a preference for something.

But for Jesus, love is always an action. For Jesus, the word love is always connected to doing something and not just feeling something. If I love you, then I will sacrifice for you. I will put my own needs second to yours and I will work to serve you even if it does not serve me. So, don't say "I love you" around Jesus until you are ready to put your actions where your mouth is.

For Jesus, love without action is not real. Unlike all the rest of creation – including the angels, only human beings are able to fake love. And why would we fake love for our neighbor? Maybe we want something from him or her. Maybe we are rewarded by pretending to love

someone. For instance, a guy gets immediate higher status when he dates a popular girl. Maybe people think we are better than we really are because of the way we pretend to love others or maybe it is easier to fake love than to tell the truth. Fake love is easy. It is just words...a sales pitch more or less. But real love is work.

So what does it mean to truly love your neighbor?

First we have to remember who our neighbor is. Everyone is our neighbor, not just the people we choose or the people we like. Your brother, sister, mom, dad, husband, wife are all your neighbors. I have seen husbands and wives that treat each other worse than I would treat an enemy. We have all seen and participated in how brothers and sisters treat one another. But it goes beyond family. That mean teacher or rude boss is your neighbor. Even that hideous person in the alley who seeks to do you harm is your neighbor.

Second, to love your neighbor is work. Real love means to apply all 10 of the Commandments to all your

neighbors all of the time. We don't pick and choose which ones we wish to apply according to how we feel about someone at a given moment (you hurt my feelings so the commandment about gossip doesn't apply to you today while I tell everyone how you hurt my feelings). We neither ignore the bag lady on the street because she takes too much effort nor the wealthy politician who just voted to raise our taxes because we show love to all. But that is hard. That is really a steep command from the Lord.

Well, it is and it isn't. It is a difficult thing from a human perspective – in fact, it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible. By ourselves we cannot love. But when God dwells within us we can do anything.

Trust what Jesus says. He has done what he said he would do. And what he did empowers us to love. St. Paul says that it's easy to love and serve your neighbor – in fact, it is what you have been set free to do. Because of what Christ has done for us, we are fit and focused for love.

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

Adam was put in the garden to work, that is to do meaningful, productive things and we were put in this world to love God and others which is both meaningful and productive. Our baptisms have worked the miraculous! Now that we are free, we have to work not to love! And that is the problem.

Satan works harder than we do. He wants us to believe that we cannot love. He wants us to lose confidence in God. He wants us to think of the Lord’s Supper as a silly church ritual that we do with no particular meaning. He wants that because that is how he paralyzes us. If we ever believed that we are as powerful as we are, we could wreak havoc in Hell! Imagine the people of God pouring out love in the face of spite and anger. Imagine the people of God believing with all their heart that do not need to win and they do not need to get even. Imagine the people of God believing that they are fit

and focused for love and faithfully stepping forward in their calling. The power would be unstoppable. The power is unstoppable.

Don't accept Satan's lies. The shackles have been removed. You are free again to love. Let go of everything that is not consistent with love because if it is inconsistent with love, it is inconsistent with God. Trust in Jesus.

Believe St. Paul. Set your eyes on him and move forward in life until death when you will have finished your service and you will bask in his love forever. Amen.