

Sermon

August 31, 2014

Title: Sincerely Yours

Text: Romans 12:9-13

The Real Deal

"I love you!"

Three of the most powerful words in the English language: "I love you!"

What a difference between saying: "I like you," and "I love you!"

What a difference between saying: "I need you," and "I love you!"

What a difference between saying: "I want you," and "I love you!"

We understand "liking," "needing" and "wanting" as meaning something altogether different from truly loving someone.

You can love your car, your tablet, your last haircut or your nails. You can love a tv show or a good book. But is that the same as saying to that most important person in your life: "I love you"?

No wonder that we think long and hard before we say those 3 words to our future wife or husband!

But for love to mean anything, it must be real. It must be sincere.

The mark of God's People:

How important is love to God? He made it the defining mark of His Family. Jesus told His disciples:

John 13:34-35 NIV

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

In the Old Testament time God's people were defined by their ancestry and their commitment to God's Law. Things such as honoring the Sabbath Day, circumcising male infants, and only eating certain foods all served to mark them as God's people. In fact, they regarded the rest of the human race as "foe," not "friend." Worship in their great temple in Jerusalem was reserved for Jews alone.

Jesus, in saying "by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," redefined God's People, not around a new set of religious or cultural obligations, but around that one relationship that we all most need -- to love and be loved.

The real deal:

No wonder, then, that Paul insists on love being authentic. No counterfeits. No knock-offs. If we are truly God's New Creation, then the one thing that distinguishes us must be the real deal: love that is sincere all the way through.

So what does real love look and act like?

The Core Values of Love

#1: Real love is committed to what is good:

To understand what real love, God's Love, is like, Paul explains Love's value system.

The first value he highlights is that of Love's commitment to what is good. Goodness is something built into Creation. The Creation Story tells us that God signed off on each part of His world by calling it "good." To be restored as human beings means first and foremost becoming committed to that same goodness which God built into His world.

Paul writes:

Romans 12:9 NIV

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Note: Paul is not saying "hate people who are evil." He is saying that we are to hate the evil that corrupts and enslaves people made in God's image. We are to hate that which destroys God's good Creation. We are to cling to what is good. We are to have clear and immovable boundaries between Good and Evil.

As Paul says in his famous poem about love:

1 Corinthians 13:6 NIV

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Real love begins with a love for all that is good.

#2: Love springs from the heart:

The second value that Paul highlights has to do with the genuineness of our affection for each other:

Romans 12:10a Kingdom New Testament

Be truly affectionate in showing love for one another;

To love someone means more than simply tolerating their presence. It means to open our hearts to them. It means to go out of our way to show them that we appreciate and value them.

When your child is hurting, you don't just write a note that says "I love you" and stick it on the fridge. You scoop the child up in your arms. You put him or her on your lap and read a story. You go out for an ice cream.

Sincere love lights up a dark world. It cannot be hidden.

#3: Love always shows respect:

The third value that Paul highlights is that of respect:

Romans 12:10b Kingdom New Testament

...compete with each other in giving mutual respect.

Sincere love means more than showing affection for someone. It means demonstrating a deep respect for that person as a man or woman made in God's image. It means always remembering that the people we love have a right to be the people who they are -- not just a projection of what we want them to be. Even when things go wrong -- as they certainly will -- if we love them, we'll respect them and their point of view.

Paul expands this idea of love/respect in his poem on love:

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 NIV

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

When we envy or brag we disrespect others. When we dishonor a person by what we say or do, we fail to show them the respect they deserve. The same is true of selfish or angry behavior. And when we keep score of past hurts and wrongs, we devalue them.

Sincerely Yours

Love in action:

Your life is filled with people who need your sincere love. They may be family members. They may be people at work. They may be people who are part of our church family. To live out that love you will need to:

#1: Cling to what is good.

This means never compromising your values in an attempt to coerce or earn love. It means never doing something wrong as a way to show someone you care about them. As God's People we can trust the good Creator who built goodness into His world. We can trust that He will show us a way to love each other as a part of that goodness, not in spite of it!

#2: Show your affection.

Love is an action word. Love is a verb. Sincere love cannot be hidden. It must be acted upon.

How do we do that? Dr. Gary Chapman teaches that there are at least 5 different ways that we express and receive love. He calls them The Five Love Languages:

- Words of Affirmation
- Acts of Service
- Receiving Gifts
- Quality Time
- Physical Touch

Find out how the people in your life best communicate love. Learn their love language. Then show them that you truly love them.

#3: Show respect.

Remember that sincere love always respects others. Funny how fuzzy boundaries can become when it comes to the people who are closest to us. We start to see them as an extension of ourselves. But when that happens, all too often we forget to respect them as unique expressions of God's Image.

One of the greatest tests of parenting comes when a son or daughter is no longer a little child you can scoop up onto your lap or give orders to that must be obeyed. There eventually comes a time when the child becomes a young woman or a young man, an equal, a peer. That's when *respect* becomes a major way of saying "I love you!"

Sincerely Yours:

The story of God's relationship with the first people He created is a story of this kind of love in action.

- In his relationship with Adam and Eve God never blurred the line between Good and Evil. Instead, He explicitly commanded them to choose the Good, and He called them out when they did not.
- God did not simply love them from afar. No, He walked with them in the cool of the day -- quality time. He lovingly clothed them after they had disobeyed them and were burdened with guilt and shame. And one day He would give His one and only Son as ransom for a fallen race.
- Yet all along God never ceased to offer to Adam and Eve, or the rest of us for that matter, a deep respect. He gave them -- as he does you and me -- freedom to choose between Good and Evil, Right and Wrong, Love and Hate. He has never given up on the humans that He created to be His reflections into His world. He respects you more than anyone else.

And He wants you to be a love letter to others in your world -- a letter that is filled with His kind of love, and a letter that can be signed "Sincerely Yours."