



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

November 15, 2015

"To Love" (THE VINE Sermon Series)

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**O**ur passage for today is just one verse: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

As we continue on our sermons on the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John, we come to a series of messages on love. In John chapter 15, Jesus said He is the Vine and that we are the branches. The Bible also says that God is love. That is His essence. 1 John 14:16 says, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them." So if we are connected to Jesus, the love in Jesus should flow from Him to us. There should be evidence of His love in us.

Love is a pretty big word. It's a big concept. But for a follower of Christ, we need to understand the power of love and what it means for us today. Love should be the currency of the realm. It should also be the mark of the Christian. If we don't live it, then we may be just like the Pharisees who liked following rules and regulations. But if we are known for love, wow, there are no bounds.

For this morning's message let us look at love in terms of these five points that all begin with the letter "P."

## 1) Love is possible.

When we hear that we are to love one another as Jesus loves us, we might think that's impossible and say, "I can't love like Jesus. He is perfect. He's God. I'm just human.

But actually Jesus is not asking us to do something that is impossible. That would be frustrating. He is not asking us to jump 20 feet in the air or leap over a tall building in a single bound. He is NOT saying, "You need to love like me. Oh, but you can't, so too bad. You will now go to hell."

No, he's not saying that. He is simply asking us to love others just as He has loved us. We CAN love like Jesus did. It's possible. And the clue, Jesus says is to love others as we love ourselves. Did you know He said that?

One day an inquisitive attorney tried to question Jesus in an attempt to throw him off. He gave Jesus a pop quiz for a quick cross-examination. The lawyer asked:

*Matt. 22:36 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"*

*Matt. 22:37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."*

*Matt. 22:38 This is the greatest and first commandment.*

*Matt. 22:39 And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

There it is! There is the secret of how to love like Jesus. Love others like you love yourself. That's the model!

The truth is we love ourselves pretty well. If you disagree, try this one: If

someone attacks us emotionally, we defend ourselves, don't we? If we think we have done something wrong, we defend ourselves. We give ourselves a break. We say, "Hey I'm only human. Give me another chance. I didn't know. Not my fault!"

We look for ways to promote ourselves, maybe at times even brag. And when things go painfully bad, we think we should be the exception and even say to God, "Why me, Lord? Why should I have pain? Help me." We say all of that because we love ourselves. We give our selves grace and mercy. Hence, we know THAT is not impossible.

Jesus says to love others as you love yourself. Give other people a break, offer forgiveness, see that they are just human, try to hear it their way just like you want people to hear you saying it your way. Let them brag a bit, just like you do. Give them a second chance like you would want one. Listen to them as you would like to be listened to. Treat others as you would like to be treated. Or as the Bible says:

*Eph 4:32 "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.*

When people go through pain, help them just as you want help when you go through pain.

Don't isolate people, just like you don't like being isolated or left out of parties. Love others like you love yourself.

**Y**our loving yourself is so powerful. Use that same power of love to love others.

### 2) Love is perpetual.

That means love keeps going on. The capacity of love is far greater than you and I can imagine. It is boundless, unfathomable, unceasing, unending, unlimited.

My friend Barb Wright, who used to live in Hawaii but now lives in Philadelphia, is in town. Decades ago months after I went through a divorce before I became a pastor, I remember talking to Barb asking her if I will ever love again. I felt my love was used up. Finished. Empty. Could I ever love or trust again?

And she said something I never forgot. She said, "Love has no end. Its capacity is far greater than you could imagine. She said, "I have two daughters, Lynne and Beth. I don't love one daughter 50% and the other daughter 50%. I love each daughter 100%. You can love again 100%."

And she was right, the capacity of love is unending. It's far greater than I imagined. (A photo of the Chun family was shown.) Today I love my wife Pam 100% and each of my three kids Noelle, Dylan and Quinn, 100% each. I even love my two dogs Max and Molly 100% each. We can love people in great quantity with no limit. We need to love people afar and those right near us. As the Bible says, "Love knows no end." 1 Cor. 13:8

### 3) Love is proximity.

Jesus asks us to love the people right near us. He asks us to love the common folk, and that is the people right next to us. They may not be very snazzy – just kind of pedestrian, but can we love the ordinary?

When he first became a Christian, C.S. Lewis wrote about his initial distaste for other people in the church but

then realized that it was wrong of him to judge others. In his classic book *Screwtape Letters*, Lewis wrote about a senior demon called Screwtape telling a junior demon called Wormwood how to mess with the mind of a Christian that is assigned to him so that the Christian becomes more unloving. In the book, the Christian is called the "patient." And here is what Screwtape says to Wormwood about his patient:

"When he (the Christian) goes inside [his church], he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print.

"When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbours .....Provided that any of those neighbours sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous.

"At his present stage, you see, he has an idea of 'Christians' in his mind, which he supposes to be spiritual but which, in fact, is largely pictorial.

"His mind is full of togas and sandals and armour and bare legs and the mere fact that the other people in church wear modern clothes is a real —though of course an unconscious— difficulty to him.

"Never let it come to the surface; never let him ask what he expected them to look like. Keep everything hazy in his mind now, and you will have all eternity wherein to amuse yourself by producing in him the peculiar kind of clarity which Hell affords.

"Work hard, then, on the disappointment or anticlimax which is certainly coming to the patient during his first few weeks as a churchman. The Enemy [meaning God] allows this disappointment to occur on the threshold of every human endeavour." *The Screwtape Letters - II* (C.S. Lewis)

We need to get together with everyone in the church and outside our church and those in other denominations and not be judgmental. As the late pastor scholar Ray Stedman spoke of the love of the Christian:

"If a church is nothing more than a crowd of people coming to gather and listen to a speaker, then it's no different from a convention or a conference with a secular theme.

"The difference is that as Christians we share our lives with each other and bear our burdens, and help each other as much as we can; we can tell our needs and truly love one another.

"When we put this all together, we understand the love Jesus is talking about. We pray for each other and see the fruit, which we bear by doing this.

"Jesus always prayed for His disciples and His life exuded compassion, strength, beauty, and grace. This is what He expects us to do as we follow Him.

"If we love God, we will also love each other. This is the great command which makes the difference between the church, as a community of men and women who love each other, and the world around us, which essentially neglects and is indifferent to one another." ("Discovery Bible Study Book", "Expository Studies in John 13-17", "Secrets of the Spirit"; by Ray C. Stedman. Publisher is Word Books in cooperation with Discovery Foundation, Palo Alto CA p92)

### 4) Love is present.

The love of Christ is in us. He is present. When we choose to follow Him the Holy Spirit comes in to us.

**A**nd with that is a flooding of God's love. When we love people, it is the love of Christ that flows through us. If it is just our love, it will not be as unconditional, enduring or sacrificial as God's love that comes through us through the Vine as we are the branches. So if love is present, don't keep it to yourself. Just do it. Love others.

Sometimes we don't feel like loving people, and we are not sure what to do. Quoting C. S. Lewis again:

*"Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."*

— C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Sometimes we don't love our spouse or our boss or our cousin or aunt or uncle. But if don't have the feelings of love, we are still called to act as if we do love them. We may not LIKE them, but we are to love them – to still be kind and loving to them. That is hard to do. Sometimes we are hurt and bitter. And that is why we need the Holy Spirit in us.

It's a strange thing to say that if you don't love someone to act as if you do. But I do agree with C.S. Lewis that if you consistently act AS IF YOU DO, then one day you will really love that person. I don't mean romantic love necessarily, but an agape love that overlooks the other person's emotional ugliness.

#### **5) Love is passionate.**

Everything is connected to love if we have passion to help and serve others, like in tithing and volunteering. Helping and serving others should be sacrificial and courageous.

Friends, there is great need to help those who are less fortunate—those who are poorer than we, those who

are hurting more than we. But because of human nature, it's tempting to always think of ourselves first and want to keep everything to ourselves and not others.

We are facing a huge \$300,000 deficit going into the last two months, and that is if we don't spend a penny in 60 days. And I know that no one outside the church is going to take care of this except us. There is no small group in Ohio or Silicon Valley or New York who is thinking about helping us. This is our church, and no one else's but ours to run and serve the people.

One of the reasons our church talks about tithing – which is the giving of 10% of our income to the Lord's work— is that it's a check in our system that:

- Everything is the Lord's.
- We can live on 90% of what we make. That we can live simply. By living on 90% of what we make, we can be generous and be able to help others.
- Tithing is a check in our system that we like our church, we love our church...and that we love people and want to lead them to Christ and help them in their walk towards God.

Tithing reminds us that the only way our church can continue to serve the community is if people give SEED MONEY. That is basically what tithing is – seed money. We're putting out seeds so that the Lord's ministry can grow. We plant a seed here and people over there receive help.

For example, people are helped with their emotional situations or maybe addictions through our ministry called Celebrate Recovery. GriefShare, on the other hand, helps those who have lost loved ones, while Divorce Care helps those going through the pain of divorce and separation.

When we give to our church, we are also planting seeds for children and

teenagers to know Jesus, as most people come to Jesus before they are 18 years of age. That's really important seed planting.

I know it is a sacrifice to give money to God but really in the end, no one can out give God. He always gives us more than we give to Him. And God is no one's debtor. It's not like He owes us when we tithe. What He does for us is ALWAYS a lot more than what we could ever do for Him.

I know for this as a fact: whoever gives generously to God will always receive a generous blessing back from God. Oh not dollar for dollar but there will be a major blessing. You can't out-give God.

Giving to God is a thermometer for our passion to thank Him and make His love reach more people. What is our mission statement? Love God, love people, and reach the world for Christ.

Now not all might be able to give 10 per cent this year, but it should be a goal to aim for. Tithing is a principle in the Bible. It's a mark of love for others. If you are only giving 1% now, then aim to give 3% this year. That would triple your giving.

But you might say, "Giving 3%, or 5% or 10% is really hard." So let me offer a practical ramp in taking the next step in personal stewardship. The context is that we serve a generous God who invites us to live generous lives in response to ALL that He has done and is doing for us. So may you consider these:

- If you have never given to First Prez before, please consider giving something.
- If you are an occasional giver, consider giving regularly.
- And if you give regularly, consider giving courageously.
- If you're already an adventurous giver, thank you for your faithfulness!

**T**he fact is there is a lot of need in our church, and it's not just financial need. There is also a lot of pain. That is why we have healing services every 2 months. That is why we offer prayer at the end of each worship service. That is why we offer GriefShare and DivorceCare Surviving the Holidays seminars and Celebrate Recovery. I feel our church is healthier and more caring than ever in my 20+ years as senior pastor. We are doing a great job in trying to help those who are hurting.

But know that this is also the hardest and most hurting time for our staff. Last month, in a short two-week period, the father of Rosella Shishido, our director of communications, suffered a stroke and Rosella needed to fly to the Philippines to be with him. Her father is now recovering.

Then our college minister Greg Bryan's father had a heart attack onboard a plane and the flight had to be diverted to Savannah, Georgia and he died days later far from home, and Greg flew off to Georgia.

Our Assistant Pastor Steve Peich's mother then had a stroke and died the next day and Steve flew off to New Jersey to be with the family.

Our chaplain Marianna Meachen's husband had a heart attack two Sundays ago after church, and he is now recovering.

Our executive coordinator, Ron Mathieu, is in England right now helping his son work through his issues of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) for he served as a Navy Seabee in the Middle East.

(As an aside, on this Sunday when we're highlighting Veteran's Day, I say let's plant more seeds in this church to help those with PTSD, and we say again to the military thank you for your service. And for those suffering

from PTSD or from other disorders, please ask for help whether from professionals or friends or family. Healthy people ask for help.)

Never has our staff been hit so hard like this and so intensely at one time. And as papa bear, the head of staff, I feel their pain in a unique way. When they hurt, I feel their cumulative hurt as I do for the rest of the church members. As all of you know, when one member of the body hurts, we all hurt.

The staff normally works hard, but they are really working hard in the midst of their pain to help others. They are all back in Hawaii (except for Ron who's is still in England), and they did not skip a beat. Steve came back and went right into the organizing and speaking at the Men's Retreat last weekend. Greg is again serving at our college ministry. Rosella is still heading up our communications, and Marianna is still supporting the sick in the midst of her own pain. All of them hit the deck running on their return.

I know that you appreciate and love our church staff, and for that I'm extremely grateful. But I should add that with 1500 people in our community, please be brief in your expression of support for them now that you know what they're going through, in case you bump into them today or next week and want to say something. A simple statement will mean a lot.

Whenever I see a military person in public, I say a brief and crisp affirmation of "thank you for your service." Likewise, it would greatly help to just be brief with a "God bless" or a hug, or a "we are here for you" and then move on. With 1500 in the church, the staff can't have a long conversation with each of you.

And please don't go into your stories of what happened to you when you lost a loved one. We mean well, but

I've learned that when people learn about a problem I'm going through, some of them go into their story of how they had a similar problem. And then they walk off feeling victorious, and I'm left there standing with the pain and exhaustion from listening to their story. I'm sure you all have felt that too.

You've heard that saying: never tell anyone you have a back pain because everyone will tell you about their back pain before you can say another word. The point is we should all be in this together. Listening, loving, leaning on what God wants us to do.

And so our Lord says, "*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*" (John 15:12)

Yes, there is tremendous need in our church but as you know there's also tremendous pain outside the church. United Nations says every four seconds a child dies of hunger. Twenty-one thousand people die of every day of hunger or hunger-related causes. The extreme poverty we have witnessed around the world: the abuse, the sex trafficking. All of these are issues that our church is deeply involved in fighting, and we need the support of all in time, talent and treasure (tithes) to help children, women and men in need.

Not only is our church trying to take care of those INSIDE our fellowship but we are also trying to be part of the solution for those OUTSIDE. You may not be aware of this, but the BIGGEST part of our church's PROGRAM budget is for local and global impact ministries, otherwise known as our missions ministry. That figure is \$300,000 – ironically the same figure as our present deficit.

I need to say that even though we are in deficit, we have NOT stopped our giving to support international and local ministry partners that:\

- help rehabilitate women in prison
- rescue girls and boys from sex trafficking.
- that build houses for the homeless, give medical care locally and abroad, release children from poverty,
- help orphans,
- feed children
- evangelize in the Middle East,
- and translate the Bible for unreached people.

We believe that God will be faithful to us as we are faithful. We're committed to helping mission partners locally and abroad in doing their work for the Kingdom of God. We want to make an impact. The need is great but we can respond with the love of God in us, that Jesus commanded us to give.

Amen? Amen. Let's pray.

Lord, when we see the despair both in and outside the church, may we respond with courage – to go all out and show the world, we are DEEPLY serious about our faith and love in You Lord. Indeed, may we love God, love people and reach them all for you Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen.