

Text: Matthew 9:13

Title: Christianity = Love

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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I received an e-mail about how 4-7 year olds describe love: Chrissy a 6 yr old said, "Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs." Or Karl also 6 year old, "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and boy puts on Shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other." Tommy another 6 yr old says "Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well." Billy a 4 yr old said, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth."

Today is the day Americans celebrate love, so I thought we should discuss our calling to be compassionate. The #1 Christian virtue is compassion. It is the primary indicator to the world of our faith...John 13:34 By this all will know that you are My Disciples if you have love for one another.

I'd like to suggest we measure our Christianity not by the number of Bible verses we've memorized, or by how theologically astute we are, not even by the degree of self denial we exercise, but rather by how much love flows through us.

However, loving others is easy in theory, but quite another matter when exercising Christ's kind of love—Love one another as I have loved you...how did he love us? By laying down His life. Like C.S. Lewis words on forgiveness: Forgiveness is a lovely idea until we have someone to forgive.

I wish I could sell you on the premise that Compassion is good for you, that you will find it fulfilling, rewarding and fun. The truth is love is costly and difficult. We have a human instinct to wall ourselves off from anything difficult, thus we put limits on our love.

Robert Wootenall's book Acts of Compassion tells of a study done on Aids patients. Researchers hypothesized that one's attitude towards others impacts ones capacity for survival under extreme circumstances. Surprisingly studies indicated that people who were compliant and self sacrificing were more susceptible to cancer.

These findings lead researchers to a make a connection between an individual's attitude and the functioning of their immune system. To test this hypothesis, Aids patients were asked questions to discern their basic attitude toward life.

One of the questions was: would you do a favor for a friend who needed it--even if you didn't feel like doing it? Of all the questions asked, this was the best predictor of an Aids patient's long term survival. Those who said they would help someone died sooner than the average. Those who said they would not help lived longer. Wootenall concluded: Compassion brings its own punishment. We might want to rethink telling someone "be positive" when they are facing an illness—instead, tell them get a mean attitude.

Nevertheless Jesus calls us to be compassionate. Our model is Jesus a man for others, total self sacrifice—even enduring a cross. Jesus did not live a life accumulating the trophies of success. He died in poverty, was rejected, and executed as a common criminal.

Three things about Compassion I want to cover this morning: 1) We do not exercise compassion for the payoff. 2) Being a Christian is costly business. 3) It is not of human origin.

We tend to be guarded in how we express our compassion. We'll be compassionate if it makes us feel good. We will be generous to the extent that it is beneficial to us and our broker or accountant explains the tax advantages. I will be generous if you give me a receipt. Will my picture be in the paper on this one? Will my name be listed in the brochure at the annual banquet?

I understand that good is accomplished by our acts of charity, society is better for it, we feel better for engaging them...but that is not the compassion of Jesus. It isn't selfless in its motives. Even when we serve the poor there are barriers that we erect so that we do not truly identify with those we are serving. It's easier to send a check or toss a \$20 than it is to get involved, get dirty...

Once I came home from school and my mom has a homeless man in our house who she is feeding. He looked pretty intimidating, so after he left I scolded her you shouldn't let people like that into our house. And she said then I shouldn't call myself a Christian.

To make compassion happen we need to shift our focus off of ourselves and onto others. But this is not easy. Even when we get beyond a self oriented mindset, were faced with the dilemma of not really wanting to see the real world.

A few years back one of the political parties was having their convention in Philadelphia, so the state of New Jersey on the other side of the Delaware River spent a lot of money fixing up the roads where the delegates would be driving from their hotels into Philadelphia. A lot of money so that the delegates will think well of us and not really see the crowd as they have lived for decades. We don't readily want to see what's out there.

Or on a personal level when we are channel surfing and we come across one of those Missionary commercials with pictures of little babies with their distended stomachs, do you stop and spiritually engage it or quickly keep clicking?

We have learned to look without discerning. We have a way of looking at things and detaching ourselves in a dispassionate way, rather than seeing people through Christ's eyes who when He saw the crowd He felt compassion because they were downtrodden, hassled, sheep without a shepherd.

Somewhere between 20-40,000 people starve to death every day. This was pointed out when the Birch Society was speaking at a community forum and when this fact was pointed out, the speaker's response was; name one? They starve to death because we don't have names for them...if we took the time to get to know them we would be responsible for them. God would call us to it and that would disrupt our comfort zone it would cost us...it is easier to reduce them to statistics. Stalin said when one dies it is a tragedy, when a million die it is a statistic.

While we might not see, Christ sees...and He knows their names, their peculiar circumstances and He loves them, not with a warm fuzzy feeling, but with a tangible intervention James 2:15... Suppose a brother or sister is without food or clothing, if one of you says I wish you well keep warm and be fed but does nothing about their physical needs what good is that? I John 3:18 Let us love one another not in word, but in action.

In the book, *Prodigal God*, by Tim Keller, the Elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son should have, if he had been in tune with his Father's heart, should have said, Father my younger brother has been a fool and now his life is in ruins. But I will go look for him and bring him home. & if the inheritance is gone—as I expect—I'll bring him back into the family at my expense.

Jesus told this parable to the Pharisees who were older brothers that disdained those who make bad choices. Thus Jesus referred them to an earlier story in the Bible with another elder/younger brother combo Cain and Abel. In that story God tells that the resentful proud older brother, "You are your brother's keeper.

In the great commission, Go Make Disciples--Go is the operative word, because we tend not to go. The tendency is to withdraw into ourselves and focus on our own spiritual growth; societies problems are just too big, the secular culture just too difficult to reach. So we create pseudo legitimate reasons not to go or get involved even find Bible justification...homeless "you'll always have the poor with you."

Still Christ calls us to love them. Jesus did not sit back and tolerate them. Toleration and pluralism have been positive additions to our complex global world. But we've made gods of toleration and pluralism. The result is you do your thing and I'll do mine thus we become disconnected...as long as you don't hurt anybody I don't care what you do. Nobody ever says I don't care what you do or how you live to someone they love.

George Buttrick said tolerance is sheer evasion, a lazy uncaring, disconnected kind of thing. Jesus' kind of love isn't sitting back tolerating everything that comes along, Jesus calls us to Go and get redemptively involved in the lives of others.

Let's face it; we live in a world where people are hard to love. They deny us, disappoint us let us down, make promises they do not keep, they lie to us and about us, they drop out at the very moment we need them. Sometimes loving others is more than we can do, but it is not impossible when we have Christ as our source. Reinhold Neighbur talks about the impossible possibility...The Compassion of Jesus is impossible...

Corrie Ten Boom's family sheltered Jews during the Holocaust until someone turned them in...so the family was thrown into a concentration camp where her family died. She survived and went on a speaking tour talking about forgiveness. At one particular event she was greeting people at the door when suddenly a man she recognized as an SS man who had brutalized her came up and thanked her for the speech and extended his arm to shake hands. Corrie Ten Boom says I could not move; I could not shake his hand. I could not forgive him in spite of the fact that I had just talked about the forgiveness of Christ—but I could not forgive. Then at that moment it was as if something invaded my body and a

shock wave went through my body and lifted my arm and I shook his hand. It was not her, but something in her that enabled her to do what she could not do. Something overcame her and allowed the impossible to occur. She could only say that it was not I--it was the Lord living in me.

Christ living in and through us. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. We have lived the self oriented life and the exhausting insatiable pursuit of me, my, mine, I long enough.

It is time to live loving others and watch the supernatural results! Jim Cook at our Men's Pancake Breakfast stated, Jesus did not say do random acts of kindness He says do intentional acts of kindness.

We don't choose who gets our compassion. Dorothy Day said, I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least.

Aristotle said," We are what we consistently do." Compassion should be practiced by us Christians over and over again until it becomes a habit.

Sermon sources: John Galloway, Tim Keller, Jim Cook