

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 20 Nov 2022

Sermon Title : A Better Love

Speaker : Rev John Benedict Foo

Text : John 12:1-8

INTRODUCTION

Christian faith majors on love; God is love and He values love above everything else. (1 Corinthians 13:13) If we do not love, we do not know God. (1 John 4:8) The two greatest commandments Jesus laid down for us have to do with love - love God with all our heart, soul, mind and love our neighbours as ourselves. (Matthew 22:37-39) Our love for one another will prove to the world that we are His disciples. (John 13:35) So, the one validating proof that we are disciples of Jesus Christ is love.

By right, if we profess to be a Christian, the longer we have been one and the longer we walk with the Lord, the more loving we should be towards others. Unfortunately, no matter how long we have been a Christian, we still struggle to love God and others. It may seem like it is a natural progression for us to become more loving since God is so big on love, especially if we have been walking with the Lord, keeping these two commandments. However, some of us may have grown to love ourselves more but not God or others.

Nowadays, the world uses the word love so often that we get confused about what love truly is. We may love many different things such as food, shopping, sports, travelling and others, but that does not make us a more loving people. The greater challenge for Christians is to love with a better love – a love that is different from the way the world loves. A love that activates our heart, mind, hands and feet.

1. We show a better love when it is least expected.

John 12:1-8 describes the time when Jesus visited Lazarus and his sisters at Bethany. While everyone was enjoying their dinner, probably conversing about how Lazarus was raised from the dead and Martha was serving the guests, Mary did something very unusual. She took a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet, and then wiped it with her hair. This was a very gratifying experience for Jesus because He saw Mary's deep love for Him in that unexpected act. (Luke 7:47b)

How do we show a better love to somebody?

- When we do something unexpectedly kind and loving to the person
- When the act is least expected as there is no reason or occasion for it

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

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We appreciate news of random acts of kindness shown by strangers to others because it is unexpected as the stranger is not obliged to do it. Our friends, colleagues, family members or acquaintance can also touch us with unexpected acts of love. Perhaps Mary is doing something which many of us are yearning for – to be surprised and touched by unexpected gestures of love because it gives us a warm sense of being cared for.

- As Christians, we want to extend that gesture of unexpected love to others, so that it will be our norm rather than our exception. That it will be in our DNA to love even when there is no reason or occasion for it.

Mary's unusual act of love was least expected by the crowd at the house. It must have felt discomforting to see Mary doing this act, yet it was an attractive act.

- Mary's act of love draws us to her boldness, her unaffected, unrestrained display of love, not caring about the cost of the perfume which is worth a year's wages or the opinion of others. All it mattered was that she did it very likely out of love from her heart.

Our love should be a better love too so the world can tell that we are Christians by our better love.

2. We show a better love when we are not calculating.

To show a better love, we should not be mindful of the cost. Most of us would have shown this kind of love especially towards people we care about. This is not about being extravagant in our acts of love, it is about not being stingy or miserly.

- When Mary was using the expensive perfume on Jesus, it was not about what she was using, but about who she was using it for.
- Judas on the other hand was calculating because he was protecting his own interest. (John 12:6) We too may be calculating when we are protecting our own interest or resources, concerned about getting an advantage out of withholding. If Mary had only used a few drops Judas would most probably had not bothered. But because Mary used a lot of it (John 12:3b), Judas was not willing for that expensive perfume to be wasted on someone else when he could not benefit from it.
- The early believers in Acts 4:32 were of one heart and shared their possessions with one another. They did not care about the financial cost to themselves but instead stayed focused on the common good and mission. How can we be more like them?

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- The highest act of love is the one done on the Cross at Calvary, the gesture of love by Jesus when He died for us. God showed His great love for us by sending His only Son to die for our sake, not when we are worthy but when we were still sinners. (Romans 5:8)

God not only showed us a better love but the greatest love. He knew the price being paid, yet He did not hold back. Since we have received this love from God, we should also do the same, to not be mindful of the cost of loving. To be different as Christians by loving without calculating.

3. We should show love when we can

We should show love whenever we can because we do not know if a simple act of kindness can be so timely and mean so much to the other person.

- Mary showed her love to Jesus with the perfume even though she did not know Jesus was going to be crucified. Jesus acknowledged her doing a “beautiful thing to Him” (Mark 14:6b) by foretelling His burial (John 12:8) which was unknown to her.
- Jesus affirmed her further by saying that she will be remembered for this act of love when the gospel is preached. (Mark 14:9)

We will never know if our act of love is right with time or outcome, but the love we show might mean a lot to the person(s) receiving it, and it may be all that he/she needs at that moment.

Like Mary, we are ordinary people, but we can extend a better love to others. Jesus says that “whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (Matthew 25:45). If we are to please God, we will have to show love to the least among us.

CONCLUSION

There is no other better time to show a better love because we know not what tomorrow holds for us. Our days are numbered, so too are the days of those around us who may be in need of love and kindness desperately. For the week ahead, let us focus more on acts of love rather than just our career and family commitments and demands. We are a community of love in Christ. We can in genuine faith activate our hearts, minds, feet and hands for acts of love. Let us pray for God’s guidance on when and who we can show a better love to, so like Mary, we can empty our alabaster jar of Christian love to others.

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A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. Appoint someone to read John 12:1-8 aloud slowly and reflect.

- a. When Jesus was in Bethany, Mary demonstrated a better love toward Jesus by unexpectedly and generously using an expensive perfume on Jesus without counting the cost of her action. Since hearing this sermon, have you shown this better love to someone or a community?
- b. Faith MC's 2022 Christmas event is themed "Love Came Down". Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you or your small group how you can show a better love to someone or a community through this Christmas outreach and the Christmas season?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 3a. (i) Is the Holy Spirit prompting you to show love when it is least expected to someone in your neighbourhood, workplace, circle of friends, church or stranger?
- (ii) How can you obey His leading instead of being concerned about the right time and place to show love?
- 3b. We show a better love when we are not calculating.
- (i) What are some ways you have been calculating about your acts of love towards others especially people you have no affection for or strangers?
- (ii) What is one thing you can do to show them a better love?
4. Generous love is not necessarily expensive or extravagant financially. What are some ways you or your group can show generous love to others?
- (i) Which of the above has been a challenge for you in loving others?
- (ii) Is there a particular person(s) you or your group can commit to showing generous love to? What is one thing you or your group can do?
- (iii) How can your group members encourage one another to achieve 4(ii) above, in the following week(s), until your next meeting?

Digging deeper

In some of apostle Paul's letters, he ends with greetings and acknowledgments to person(s) for their acts of kindness to him. These acts of a better love to him encouraged him to continue his ministry. Identify some of these acknowledgements in his letters and discuss how you and your group can do likewise to help and encourage other Christians and missionaries in their work for Christ.

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C. Testimonies, Prayer and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share your personal testimony on your experience either as the giver or recipient of this better love. Include how this has strengthened your faith and love for others.

OR

Give thanks to God for His better love on the Cross for humanity that is unexpected, uncalculating and generous - the perfect love we can receive from Him to share with others.

6. Bring all that have been shared to God, especially the acts of love that you have committed to bring to others in 3a(ii), 3b(ii) and 4(ii). Ask the Holy Spirit to help you step out of your comfort zone to truly love others as Christ has loved you. Pray that God will enable you, your small group and our church to always encourage one another with a better love so the world may know we are disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. Great Things – Phil Wickham <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4CY3nf1Mvw>
2. Be Enthroned – Bethel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3BJoKj0MZg>
3. Alabaster Jar – Gateway Worship <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFhftNsHyds>

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