

Sermon Text for February 4, 2018

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Genesis 18:1-8, Romans 12:9-13

“What’s love got to do with it?”

Christian ethics and morality is what Paul is writing about in chapter 12. A few weeks ago we saw that our ethics in our culture has shifted from that of feeding the poor, clothing the naked to one of sex as the fundamental definition of who is ethical. Last week we were encouraged to do our job as we live out our Christian ethics within a Christian community. I thought it was important as we talk about doing our job to get prepared for the Super Bowl by seeing a pastor who insists in a press conference how important it is for all of us to do our job. Let’s watch. **VIDEO**

This week we find that you cannot separate what it means to be an ethical Christian and love filling your life and being the primary response to the salvation that we enjoy in Jesus Christ. Love, we will find, has everything to do with who we are, how we act and react, it has everything to do with our relationship with God, with our family, and especially with those we don’t even know. Those whom we come across in our lives as strangers and as we choose whether to receive them or to cast them aside. Love defines how we reach out to the stranger in our midst.

READ SCRIPTURE

Renita Weems, called love the most elusive of all human experiences. I think that is why Tina Turner is able to belt out what’s love got to do with it, because if you have to ask the question, you haven’t obviously caught hold of that experience or understood it in a deep and meaningful way. Anyone who has truly loved and has been truly loved knows that love has everything to do with it and it is so much more than a second hand emotion or experience.

As a pastor I am able to counsel with a whole variety of people who are dealing with a myriad of issues, both good and bad. From issues of substance abuse to infidelity to the joys of premarital counseling and new births. I am able to share with you your joys and your sorrows, your strengths and your weaknesses.

What I have found is that the basic, fundamental, underlying issue is whether or not someone has been able to capture love or not. Those who are constantly searching for love because when they were young they felt a parent was unavailable, or even worse

if they were abused. The rest of our lives we go on trying to find a way to capture that love that was either taken from us or we never had. Sometimes we spend our lives in feeble attempts to try and capture that elusive human experience.

Today Paul gives us good news. We may want to relegate love to a second hand emotion because we haven't been able to define it and capture it. But the good news we get from Paul is that the love you may have lost, the love you never had, can be experienced today through Jesus Christ, the love you never had, can be experience today through this family that we call church. Believe it.

I know there are people here, probably more than those who are not, who are searching to fill that void. Maybe we have defined ourselves as failures. Maybe we think our life is dead, nothing new, no excitement. Jesus looks at us and defines us not by the lack of love that we think we have, but by the love that our Father has for us, the love that God has given us and is there for our taking.

Paul starts at verse 9 by stating that love must be genuine. The Greek there is very different from what we read in the English. Instead of a command, Paul is just telling us what love is. Love is not hypocritical is the literal Greek. Love does not say one thing and then do another. Love does not make promises that it knows it cannot keep. This terminology is almost identical to Paul's love chapter in I Corinthians 13. If you have never heard these verses, and you are having a hard time dealing with issues of love, go home and read these over.

Listen to what love is. I can have everything else in the world, and all the worldly possessions, but if I do not have love, who cares. Love is patient, love is kind, love, well, you heard it, you know what it says. It never ends. But listen to what Paul says: Agape is not hypocritical. Verse 10, Philadelphia with philos. Love each other, is what Paul states. On Super Bowl Sunday we just happened to have a verse that contains the word Philadelphia in nit. God is good, isn't he? In the midst of this ethical discussion Paul reminds us that love has to be the root of all good.

Where does this love come from? Does it originate with us? Can we find it in the embrace of a lover? Can we find it in thoughtful conversation, can we find it in anything in all creation? Scripture tells us that God is love. Not like love, or close to love, but God is love. I think we just caught this elusive experience, and found out that the only

time it was human was when Jesus Christ walked upon this earth. So maybe it is better to say that this elusive human experience caught us.

Maybe we spend our time looking and choosing that which is love when all along God is waiting patiently for us to open our eyes and stop trying so hard to find it in those places that only lead to heartache. For God so loved the world that he gave us his only son. We love God because God first loved us.

Because of God's love for us which defines us, shapes us, erases the void that we may have had since childhood, it also does something for us that one may not expect. It allows us, as a result, to love others back. Now this is a crucial final point and it has everything to do with Christian ethics. Why do we, as Paul states, do all these ethical actions? It is not because it is a list of rules that we have to follow and if we don't follow them then God so loved the world except Bob Bronkema because he didn't follow through in what he was supposed to do. No.

Because God loved us, we respond in love. That is what ethics is all about, our human response to God and others because of God's love for us. Because God loved us we can be zealous, we want to be zealous. Love does that to you. I remember when I was first in love, I kissed that girl and I don't remember anything else that day, I had a silly smile on my face. Our spirit is ardent, it burns, we serve the Lord, not because we are afraid he will punish us if we don't, but because we love him.

Paul's list goes on explaining why as Christians we are ethical. We rejoice in hope. As Christians you have to be an optimist because if Christ is for us, who can be against us? We are patient in suffering because we know that all things work for good for those who trust in the Lord. We persevere in prayer. Did you know that if you rearrange the letters to Presbyterian you get Best in Prayer. But did you also know that if you do not think you are loved it will affect your prayer life? If you are not absolutely convinced that God made you, loves you, embraces you, comforts you, who are you going to pray to?

If you love, you will put all your trust in God for your needs so your giving will be out of love and confidence. We have such a loving church. Extending hospitality is another example. Paul does not give us a list of ethical rules to follow, to measure up how we are doing, but rather a freedom to live and follow that which we would do

naturally for our creator who loves us and so we want to love them back. Love gives you freedom it doesn't make you a prisoner.

So what's love got to do with it? It has everything to do with our relationships, to begin with God's defining love. God's love is indisputable and it is upon this love which is handed to us, easily captured as it captures us, that we rely. Paul, as he writes to the Romans, understood the love that people had experienced in their loves. Broken, empty. He knew that in a family, this church family, one could begin again to face life, and to base their life, their ethics upon the love of Christ found within the community. Amen.