

Sermon Text for February 13, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Leviticus 19:18, I John 4:7-12

“God is love”

We have a couple of big days in front of us. Super Bowl Sunday today, more people will gather together to watch a football game than will go to church today, about 83 million go to church and 91 million watch the game. I mean, I’m not jealous, I’m just saying. Tomorrow is another big day, two whammies in a row. I got into a conversation with someone this past week in regards to what do we do for our spouses or our significant others on Valentines Day? You have the traditional flowers and go out to eat.

Some of us focus more of our attention on our kids and making sure they get something, but don’t necessarily do anything just the two of us. Stacy and I are going to have my brother and his wife over. Funny thing, we said, hey, how about next Monday, you guys want to come over. They agreed. We hung up the phone, I said, oh, that’s Valentine’s Day, maybe they do something. I called them and said we don’t normally do anything on Valentine’s Day, is that a problem for you guys? They said, no, we don’t either, see you on Monday. Maybe it’s a Bronkema thing.

Today we are looking at in our readings how do we show and manifest our love to the ones that we love, what proof, what evidence, what tangible signs do we see in our love for those who are closest to us? Is a one day a year display of affection all that it takes? Or even more importantly, how do we show our love, what proof, what evidence, what tangible signs do we see in our love for God? Is a once a week ritual a fulfillment of what is required, or is there something more to our relationship with our Creator? Our Scriptures should give us those answers. Let’s read.

READ

I warned you that Leviticus then lead to Numbers and you didn’t believe me. We continue to read through the Bible together and don’t you love the readings that we have for this week, I mean at least the opportunity that we are given to be able to focus on love because of the readings that we were immersed in this week. Our first reading is one that we could have easily have skipped over since it was embedded in the rules and regulations that made our eyes glass over. It sounds more like a New Testament teaching from our Savior. But because it is

embedded in the rules and the regulations then it is itself a rule and a regulation and a commandment that the people were given and that we have to pay attention to.

It is from this Scripture that Jesus gets his greatest commandment statement when he says that we are to love God and to love our neighbor. The origin of the second part of that statement is found here in Leviticus where the author is commanding the people of Israel how they are to love each other and love those around them, their neighbors. Do not take vengeance and do not bear a grudge. He says this directly to the Israelites in how they are to treat Israelites, their own family. Don't bear a grudge in your family, don't take vengeance in your own family. No matter what you have been through, oh Israelites as you have made your way through the wilderness in these past two years, do not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your own family.

This obviously isn't strictly a New Testament thought, instead this has been God's nature and God's desire all along. In our New Testament reading we see the word love, agape, is mentioned 15 times in just 6 verses. Can you ever have too much love? So the questions remains what is love? We have a wonderful description of love in what is considered the love chapter in I Corinthians 13, let's just hear some of that, you have to hear some of the love chapter on the day before that we celebrate love, see if you resonate with it, and some of you can remember your wedding vows to each other: love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude, it doesn't insist on its own way, love never ends. That's beautiful and incredibly helpful as a description of love.

But our New Testament reading in John this morning is considered the standard of the theology of love. Not so much what is love, but more of what is the reason why we love? Let's look at that reading for this morning. It begins by the author calling us, the readers, his beloved. And encourages us to love one another. We then go to verse 8 where we read not that God loves us, which He does without a question, but rather that God is love. God's nature, God's identity, the make-up of who God is can be summed up in one word, love. Just like the simple sermon title so John gives us the most simple definition of who and what God is, God is love.

He goes on to say that a condition of being a child of God is that we are loving. Think about that. How do you show your love for God? The standard of love is set by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. How do we know if someone loves us and how do we know if someone loves God? The only way to truly know is if they meet the standard that was set by Jesus on the cross. What is that standard of love that is required of us as well you ask? We hear in vs.10 that it is

nice to love God in our own way, but that is not the way in which God loves us, and he wants us to love Him and each other in the way that He loved us.

We find the standard of love in I John 3:18, then again in John 15:12-13, then again in John 13:34-35. For what we have to understand is that we love God not to gain anything, but rather as we read later in this chapter in vs.19 that we love God because he first loved us.

God is love and God loves us. Be aware that failure to love invalidates any claim that we may have to know God. Often we think our love for God can only be manifested by doing things for God. But if a person does not love, even if they come to church every Sunday, but do not love, even if they teach Sunday School, but do not have love, even if they are deacon extraordinaire or been on session for 30 years or been caring for our buildings non-stop but have not love, not only are they missing out, says John, but they do not love God.

If the standard is set by God then we have to understand what that means when we read Romans 5:8, that even while we were yet sinners, God proves his love for us by dying for us. How many people have we discounted and called out and thought unworthy of our love because they may have been dishonest to us once, or taking advantage of the goodness that we have to offer at this church. What this means is that if we have a service at this church and someone takes advantage of it, then we show our love for them by giving them even more.

I have watched *Les Miserables* in about 4 different countries and one of the most powerful scenes is when Valjean, the protagonist, out of hunger steals the candlestick of the church and the police capture him and the bishop comes out to him and says, you forgot this, and it was the second candlestick. Even while we were yet sinners, God loved us, that is the standard that is set for us, are we able to hold others in our love when the same thing happens to us, or are we more demanding after our debts have been forgiven that we require the debts of others to be paid in a way that we think is just?

God doesn't just show his love for us or prove his love for us, God is love. The very definition of love is based up on God's sending, giving up, his Son for the forgiveness of our sins. When we read the Bible we have to know that it speaks not only to us individually, but also to us as a church, as a family. We also think that if the Bible tells us to love and to live in a certain way then our lives together will be smoother, easier, less conflicted than our relationships outside of this church. We know that is not always the case.

But there had to be a move from the love of God that we have to our obligation to love one another. It is a move that seems non-existent in the geopolitical realm of today. As we are

on the brink of war once again, it is important to note that the countries that are nearly at war with each are countries where each claim to be Christian. Russia with its entangled relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church continues its bearish behavior. The United States where not a single president has ever been in power who hasn't self-identified as Christian seems to be bent on war as the only means to respond. Ukraine, Germany, Poland all would say that their primary call is to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and yet beloved, let us love one another seems to be falling on deaf ears.

War is sin, there is no other way to describe it, and when we send our men and women into battle we have chosen a way that is not of God and our decisions have an impact not just on us as leaders, but rather on our entire countries and our involvement in that sin. If we believe that God is truly love, then our actions with each other and with our neighbors have to have a corresponding outlet that manifests that love. May God have mercy on us as we look to put that into our own life. Amen.