

The Cost of Love

1 John 3:16-24

Jesus recognized two great commandments: love God with all your being and your neighbor as yourself. He also gave one new commandment, from John's Gospel: love one another. Love as the wisdom of Jesus shows us how to live well as we seek to follow Jesus. These two commandments reflect Jesus' priorities. What do they communicate to us about what is ultimately important? How will they shape your life and mine, these three directives: love God, love others, and love yourself.

What is love? C.S. Lewis described four types of love based on the four Greek words translated by the English word *love*. The first word is affection (*storgé*). It is as simple as your love for a pet or as profound as your love for your child or your parent. The second word is friendship (*philos*). It is love expressed through common interests – people standing side by side to face the world. The third word is passion (*eros*) – lovers who stand face to face. This is not erotic love in which someone else serves to satisfy your desires. It is being in love where all else pales before the beloved. The fourth word is self-giving (*agapé*) -- Jesus' love. The expression combines affection, friendship, and passion, but with a divine attitude and a Christ-like motivation. Such love is patient and kind, passionate and persistent. It never gives up, caring for the other's best interest. This expression of love is more *other conscious* than *self-conscious*.

How do you know you love someone? How do you feel – warm and fuzzy? Do you worry about them or get caught up in them? Are you afraid for them or proud of them? How do you act? Do you tell them you love them? Do you sacrifice yourself for them and give them gifts? Do you want to be physically close? Do you make space for them? How do you treat them? Are you respectful and honest? Do you listen and adjust your own actions to them? Do you seek their best interest? What about that question posed by the author of 1 John: “How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 John 3:17)

How do you know someone else loves you? Is it the same as when you love someone else only in reverse? Do they convey feelings that are warm and/fuzzy? Do they worry about you. Are they caught up in you, afraid for you, or proud of you? How do they act toward you? Do they tell you they love you? Do they sacrifice themselves for you or give you gifts? Do they want to be physically close to you and make space for you in their lives? Do they treat you respectfully and honestly? Do they listen and adjust their actions to you? Do they seek your best interests? The secret of love is again reflected in the words of 1 John: “little children let us love not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

Love can be defined in different ways and by different feelings, but most clearly in actions and attitudes. Again 1 John: “We know love by this, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.” How did Jesus lay down his life for us? He showed us, with courage, the passion of his love for God. He challenged the ultimate authority of Rome and the validity of the temple leadership. He faced death on a Roman cross as a non-violent seditionist to show us the way -- how to live without fear. He spent his life teaching

about the Kingdom of God. He lived and died to show us how much God loves us – that there is no need to be afraid of God. He taught us how accepting, gracious, and loving God is.

Can we know that God loves us? Can we know, as the writer of 1 John tells us, “by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us?” We can’t know. We have to choose to trust and the cost of trusting in God’s love is to step off from the banks of certainty and into the waters of faith. You have to trust that God can be found through your image of God, but you have to live like the Ken Medema song *Start Something*

*Now I’m certain, now I wonder,
now I’m walking on the water, now I’m going under
spread your wings, jump off the cliff
you might not do it if you ask, “what if?”
maybe you’ll live, maybe you’ll die
maybe you’ll fall or maybe you’ll fly.*

To live love is to risk, but the bigger risk is not to love.

Will you respond to the invitation to live a life based on love – giving and receiving love, of loving the Creator by loving the Creator’s handiwork – of being all you can be. Is there a place in your life where you don’t know, but suspect you need to go? Is there something you need to start doing or do to a greater extent to realize your potential? What can you do, even a little, to get started? Take a small step. Nothing will be clear until you take that first step.

We need to shape our lives by faith and not by believing in the right religious things, but by believing that love is the most important thing. This is not just believing with your mind, but with your heart, soul, and strength. “There is truth,” said the master, “but the doctrine you desire, absolute, perfect dogma that alone provides wisdom, does not exist. Truth is lived, not taught.” (Hermann Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game*)

Beliefs and love can come into conflict when priority is given to belief that tends to subordinate relationship to philosophy. But if the primary belief and commandment is “to love” and be loved, then relationship is primary. Love focuses on the best interest of the other and of the self -- desiring the spiritual growth of the beloved. The true doctrine of faith is love -- love lived out, love in your life. “All who obey [God’s] commandments (to love) abide in [God] and [God] abides in them and by this we know (we trust that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.” (1 John 3:24)

If the way to follow Jesus truly is to love, then as a nation we will have to seek the true best interests not only of ourselves, but also of all people. It will cost us the identity we have assumed of always being in the right and the discipline to examine our motives and policies openly and honestly. If the way to follow Jesus truly is to love, then as a congregation Crossroads Church will have to trust even more than we have that our mission is to love each other and the community around us. The cost will be a commitment to that mission to this community and to this congregation – a commitment of time, energy, money, and creativity – a commitment to who we can love both within and beyond these walls.

If the way to follow Jesus truly is to love, then as an individual part of this congregation – a teacher, leader, learner, giver, pray-er, or friend – or as part of a family -- parent, child, brother/sister – what is one thing you will do to reflect Christ-like love? Will you make space, time to listen, and time to grow together? Will you allow space for disagreement or to affirm each other? What will it cost you? Will it cost your time, your attention or maybe some patience? Mostly, it will require commitment to a shared life that means more than anything else.

If you want to make this commitment, then begin it now. Whatever your commitment is, the cost will never be so small, your motivation will never be so high, and the opportunity will never be this clearly present. Commit yourself and then share your commitment with someone you trust, someone you love. The true cost of loving is to turn your back on lesser ways of living. Commit yourself to restoring bent or broken relationships - to live more in your authentic self and to open yourself to the presence of the Spirit. This community of faith is here to help you, to guide and support you, and to teach you how and also learn from you as we share this journey in the Spirit and in Jesus' name.