

“Love of Another Kind”

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-21, 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

SJCRC

Series: Core Values of the Church #2 file 59

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Interim Ministry at San Jose Christian Reformed Church

On these Sunday mornings we've begun talking together about our **core values: the unchanging, foundational principles that guide our functioning as Christians and as a church.** Core values are like *road maps* that help us know where we are going and how to get there. Balanced together they provide wisdom. They are like a *blueprint for a building*, an architectural plan. Imagine if we got a whole group of construction people together, and we asked them to build a house. They would ask, “*Where are the plans?*” Response: “*O, there aren't any. You are all good people, and we trust you, so just build what you think it ought to be.*” Can you imagine what that would look like? We could well end up with the foundation going one direction and the framers going another, with a bath tub in the living room, and with a toilet on the front porch. Spiritually functioning without a plan is what the Old Testament refers to as “*everybody did what was right in their own eyes.*” How often do people want the church to do what they want? We might ask, whose church is it? **We need a plan,** a blueprint that guides our decisions, our reactions, our relationships, our attitudes, and the way we understand ourselves, each other and the world, and our ministry plan. **God is the architect, and his blueprint is laid out in the whole of the Bible.**

Last week we talked about **unity in the church in the context of our connection and relationship to God** – a unity built on our spiritual oneness with Christ instead of our sameness or uniformity. **This morning** we will look at **love as a core value.** Acknowledging that we can only touch the surface of what needs to be said about the Bible's teaching on love, let's look at this core value: What is it?

What does it look like?

How does it work?

1. What is it? (this love that is a core value of the church?)

It is difficult to even start talking about love; **there are so many different definitions of that little word.** If we listen to popular music we might get the impression that love is an obsessive-compulsive disorder that is determined to manipulate another person into making **us** happy regardless of the other person's feelings or needs. Actually, it often sounds like a rather severe illness that demands immediate medication and extensive therapy. **Movie**

goers might get the impression that love has something to do with a frantic pursuit of sexual gratification, not unlike a meal for a starving person. **THE WORLD IS IN LOVE WITH FEELING IN LOVE, of falling into some semi-psychotic state with addictive dependency feelings.** The most popular station to listen to for people in our society seems to be **WIIFM: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME.** If it feels good, it must be love.

Cynicism aside, **there are so many definitions of love.** There is love between two people committed to each other in marriage. There is the family love of children for parents, parents for children, and between siblings. In these kinds of love **we quickly have to move beyond simple feelings,** as important as they are, **to love that functions in our actions.** Love is doing – a verb. **Love is behavior** toward and for another person, even when we do not feel like it. What do you think, what kind of love is deeper – love when you feel like it, or faithful love when one feels too tired to love? And there is love between friends, among neighbors, between God's people, on and on. I have also observed Christians with some strange definitions of love, thinking that it means taking care of other people so they don't grow up or take any responsibility for themselves. For some love seems to mean that people do not have to be responsible for their actions. Counselors call that the enabling "love" of alcoholism and co-dependency.

Our text this morning says, **"God is love."** **The Bible tells us that love comes from God, and the people who love know God.** We all immediately understand that the Bible is not suggesting that the crooner of country-western songs about love necessarily knows God. **GOD IS LOVE! What does that mean? It is so important that we understand this love because it is the basis, the model of our core value of loving and being loving people.** The Bible tells us over and over to love as we have been loved, to be imitators of God, to have the mind of Christ (Ephesians 5:1, Philippians 2, etc.) Jesus bluntly says, **"If you love me, obey my commandments and love one another."** **WHAT really is this?** Work with me to begin an answer to that question. What does this love look like?

People have used this statement, **God is love,** to come up with all sorts of strange ideas about God. For some, it is as if this is the only statement about God in the Bible. They define who God is by their own definition of love, and end up with an impotent, squishy God who looks like some combination of **Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and a divine doting**

grandfather. We need to be reminded that John also says: God is light, God is holy, God is all-powerful, God is just, and God is faithful.

The foundation or model of our core value as Christians is a love of another kind. (repeat!) It is not what people normally think of as love. The Bible uses the Greek word: **agape'** – literally, **love that is based, not in the desirability of the one loved (as we usually love), but in the decision of the lover to love.** (REPEAT) God decided to love us. It comes from his will and character. It is based and centered in God. It is not about our being so loveable. We normally love the loveable, meeting our needs. The Bible calls us to love as we have been loved. Maybe the closest we ever get to loving like God loves is at the birth of our children. I can remember just looking at my newborn sons, with all their wrinkly skin, and loving them so much I could hardly stand it. Had they done anything to earn love like that? I remember walking out of the hospital thinking that the world should stop and take note of this miracle. This is one of the joys of baptism. God affirms his love, and we love a little like he does.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only son....” “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us....” How can a holy God – perfect and just – **love unholy, imperfect sinners,** people who are so often selfish and self-centered, people who often want their own way at the expense of truth and justice? **Our text says, “THIS IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD, (NOR THAT WE ARE SO LOVEABLE) BUT THAT HE LOVED US AND SENT HIS SON AS AN ATONING SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS.”** On the cross we see God’s love and justice and holiness come together. His **justice** demands payment for evil; that is the sacrifice, the penalty of death. In his **love** he paid the price for you and me himself so we could be in relationship with him. This is not just some nice feeling, or some easy statement. It cost God dearly to love us. Love is **agape'** – *founded in the lover.*

The Bible uses another word for God’s love – **karis – grace.** **God’s love is a gift.** We cannot earn it. We cannot buy it. By ourselves we cannot get good enough to deserve it. **It is a gift.** All we can do is accept it or refuse it. All we can do is be filled with the awe of being loved and say, *“Yes, Lord, I believe you love me. I accept your gift.”* OR, we walk away with our pride intact, telling ourselves that we can do it ourselves, we don’t accept gifts, and we don’t need them.

It is hard for us to receive, to accept gifts. It is a humbling experience to be honest enough with ourselves to recognize our need, our emptiness, and our impotence, to open ourselves and let God fill us. If you have been there, you know the tears, the awe, the overwhelming reality: **God – Almighty, Eternal, Holy God – loves me!** People want to avoid the pain of it, the humility of it, and so they miss the joy too. It is a gift! **Receiving this gift is the first requirement for us to be able to function with the core value of A LOVE OF ANOTHER KIND.** People who are too proud to be humbled this way cannot understand how the church is supposed to function with the core value. If you do not recognize this awesome and humbling experience of being divinely loved with a love of another kind, do not let the day end before you open yourself to God. He wants to give you the gift. God loves you, and there is nothing we need more – both personally in our lives, in our relationships, and as a community. Without this gift from God this is all goobly-gook. It makes no sense at all. Without it we cannot know God and what I am saying is absurd. **It takes the humility of knowing our need. (If you are just a critic, above needing love, you won't get this.)**

Having received this love, it becomes our core value – a life-guiding principle and value in dealing with other people, giving what we have received. John says, **“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love (with this love of another kind) does not know God, because God is love....”** **“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another....”** **“If anyone says, ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, he is a liar.”**

2. What does this love look like in church?

What does this love look like? First, it is **being valued as a person**, in spite of all the weaknesses, flaws and failures. It is not blindness to them, but valuing a person in spite of them. It is **acceptance** of the person. How desperately we all need this! The truth is that we all have times when we feel inadequate, like failures, unacceptable. We crave accepting love. In my insecurity I ask my wife, *“Will you love me even if I fail?”* Fortunately for me, she is a very loving woman, and reassures me. We all fear being rejected. We all know the pain of the experience. Some people are so sure they will be rejected that they hide themselves with some superior stance: I am smarter, I am right, I am stronger, I am in control.

Loving as we have been loved means that **forgiveness** is readily available when asked for, because we know the price paid for God to forgive us. People are so valuable that the price is high, and the desire for spiritual growth comes through accountability. In a love of another kind there is no cheap grace – no cute words of forgiveness without understanding the pain. **It is about imitating God in Christ.**

The Bible uses many terms to describe and make his love specific. In 1 Corinthians 13 we heard love described as the **greatest spiritual gift**, a gift that God gives to all his people. This “love of another kind” is **patient**, it is **kind**, it is **humble not proud**, it is **self-giving**, – not filled with ulterior self-seeking motives, it is **not easily angered**, it **keeps no record of wrongs but forgives**, it **rejoices in truth**, is **optimistic and hopeful**. We could spend months talking about how this love expresses itself. This morning we only have time for the big picture. The Apostle Paul says, “*tell each other the truth in love.*” Philipians reminds us that **love is gentle**.

We've asked about this love, what is it? and what does it look like? **How does it work?**

3. How does it Work?

Being loved by God is the motivation for loving others, the foundation for our core value as Christians and as a church. It is our motivation for doing good and for sharing our faith. John tells us that when we love with the “love of another kind” some powerful things happen.

First, “No one has seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.” What a beautiful thing it is. Have you ever felt God’s presence in the love of people for each other? I have. And notice that last phrase == the more we give the more we receive.

Second, when we love each other (vs. 13) we know that we are connected to God – **“that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us his Spirit.”** Here we live in the assurance and confidence of being spiritually centered.

Third, our love makes our witness believable that Jesus was sent by the Father to others.

Finally, love drives out fear – giving us confidence that God’s judgment on us and our sin happened on Calvary. Powerful things happen within us when we grow in this love for each other, love as we have been loved, with a “love of another kind.”

For me these are not just words, not just wonderful abstract ideas. **I have seen people's lives changed because God's people had the courage to love with the "love of another kind."** The list of miracles that such love has created in the lives of folks in my experience would be too long to go through this morning. In the years of ministry **I have sadly also seen the opposite in the church.** I have seen men who said they loved God turn around and abuse their wives or children. What did John say about that? **He who does not love, does not know God.** I have seen people who said they loved God come to worship with a critical, hateful spirit, attacking others because something was not to their liking. They had their own agenda, not God's. I have seen people talk and gossip in ways that were cruel, self-serving and abusive. What would John say about that? I have seen people tell the truth and be totally right in ways that destroyed another person's spirit. ***"Whoever does not love, does not know God, because God is love. ... If anyone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar."*** Think with me about this. It is not optional. ***This "love of another kind" respects, accepts and values people, is self-giving, forgiving, and motivated by God's love for us.***

Love of another kind is our core value as Christians and as a church. It is at once the way our Lord expects – demands that we deal with each other, and it is a goal that brings every one of us to our knees. Will you join me in committing ourselves again this morning to 2 things: 1) **First**, to return, or perhaps for the first time, to open ourselves to **receiving the awesome, miraculous love that is the gift of God.** It takes setting our pride or guilt or hurt or fear aside so we can receive his grace. 2) **Second**, let's commit ourselves anew to **loving the people around us** – starting closest – spouses, family, friends, workmates, fellow members in God's family – commit ourselves to loving as we have been loved. God promises it will release wonderful things in our lives and in his church. ***"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God."*** We begin, and he provides more and more love.