
Lighting the Candle of Love in Your Life



Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor
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Scripture Passage John 3:16
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Probably no word has been more misused, abused, confused, trivialised in the English language than the word **LOVE**. The music industry has given us a multitude of songs about falling in love, being in love, staying in love, losing our love, losing our truck.

We need to reclaim and redeem the word **LOVE**, especially at this Christmas season because if we were to grasp its real message, it is about the love of God doing its best work.

Love is at the heart of Christianity. The Bible makes just a few simple but profound statements about the nature of God. God is light. God is love.

If you were to follow a thread from Bethlehem, you would find that bit went all the way back into the purpose of God. Love is so intrinsic to his character, to his nature, that everything God does, he does in love.

Jesus, born in Bethlehem, is the story of the love of God made visible. The nature of God is made tangible and concrete. It has nothing to do with cheap sentimentalism or mushy emotion. Love is a pulsating moral force, compounded of mercy and holiness, compassion and righteousness, strength and tenderness.

In a culture that has abused love so badly, beaten it out of shape so seriously, made it almost unrecognisable, God tells us to go in love, what does that mean to us?

Here are at least 5 different ways we have to love, put love into practice.

TO LOVE IS TO FEEL.

It is said that love is not a feeling, not just sentimentalism, and that is true, but if we are to start loving as God loved, we have to feel.

The opposite of love is not hatred. The opposite of love is apathy. We do not care. We do not feel.

We feel someone's hurt. We feel their pain and when we do that, we are at the starting place of love. When Jesus walked the earth, he was friends with a family. Their home was a place perhaps where he could go and relax, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Then one day, the sisters called to say that Lazarus had died. It says that Jesus was **moved with grief**. That word used is a word for one of the strongest of human emotions.

Jesus loved Lazarus and so he felt his death at the very depth of his soul. He did not say whatever.

When the bible says, God so loved the world, that is not just a theological statement. It is a statement about how God felt.

TO LOVE IS TO LISTEN.

I have often thought that there were at least 2 kinds of silence. There is a kind of toxic silence in which resentment grows. Perhaps between a husband and a wife, what's wrong, nothing! They are in the same house, the same bed, but is the deadly kind of silence in which anger and pain grow.

Then there is the kind of silence which is creative. No one needs to say anything, but there is health. It allows us to listen to the other person's heart, what they are feeling.

Story of Jennifer, little girl, took my face in her hands and said, you're not listening to me.

How often that is true! Imagine if as adults we did that, we took someone's face and held it and said, you're not listening to me.

Most of the time we are not really listening to people. We are just waiting our turn to speak.

One of the most basic acts of love we can extend to a person is to listen to them, to their words and to their heart.

In that intimate silence, love is born and love can grow.

TO LOVE IS TO SPEAK.

If love is created and born in silence, love also has to become a word.

“Do you love me” Tevye the milkman asks his wife in *Fiddler on the Roof*. His bewildered wife replies, I cook your meals; I wash your clothes; I bear your children, what do you mean, do I love you?

When someone asks, do you love me, it is because their heart is becoming dry and parched and they need a word of affirmation. Affirmation foundation for human confidence from which each of us step out each day.

Most of us are painfully aware of our faults and failings. We don't need other people to tell us what they are. We have become a society of nit-pickers, pointing out faults and mistakes.

Instead, love can become words that breathe life and health. God used words from heaven to communicate how he felt about Jesus. In his baptism, this is my beloved son. God was saying, I am proud of you.

I read somewhere that when we get one word that is negative, that puts us down, one critical word. We need at

least 7 words of affirmation that undo the damage and hurt to our soul that is inflicted by that one negative word.

That means a word of encouragement, appreciation, thankfulness, gratitude, affection.

When did you last tell your spouse that you loved them, really loved them and appreciated them? When did you last tell your kids and even if they are bigger than you are and it might embarrass them, give them a hug and tell them that you love them?

I am not sure what holds us back from doing this, but love is being denied.

My sense is that each of us needs to tell our spouses and our children, I love you, much more often than we do.

To love is to tell, to put the thoughts of our heart into words.

TO LOVE IS TO RESPOND.

We see the need. We feel some pain. We may even talk about it, but love, God's agape kind of love, takes it to the next step. It responds. It does something about it.

We are told, love is a verb and becomes an action. It must be more than words. It must become an event.

For God so loved that he gave...that is a response.

1st John 3:18 says, let us not love in words or in tongue but with actions and in truth.

Love is hearing the need in a family and saying, how can we respond.

TO LOVE IS TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE.

There is a step that lies beyond just responding. It calls for more than just seeing the need and then taking action. Love takes the initiative to take the first step, to make the first move.

God first loved us...that's taking the initiative.

Sometimes we might say we would be happy to respond but we say, well, nobody asked me. That might be true, but this agape kind of love does not wait to be asked. It senses the need and takes the first step.

This is a risk. We can be refused. We can be rejected. We might be told, this is none of your business. That is the risk, but God risked the same kind of pain when he sent his son into the world. He faced the very real kind of rejection and misunderstanding.

All this and much more is modelled for us by the love of God in Christ. God was risking stepping into the muddle and

the pain of our humanity. That is the heart of the Christmas story. As we saw in the video, we can pick up that thread and we can weave it into our lives and into the lives of others.

Lighting the candle of love is not just some kind of nice Christmas sentiment. It is saying, as God stepped into our world and our lives to love us, so we will light this candle of love in our hearts and continue the thread of love which was started at Bethlehem.