

Sunday, May 15, 2022

First Lesson: Revelation 21: 1-16

Gospel Lesson: John 13: 31-35

Sermon Series: Fruits of the Spirit: Love Effect

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We are beginning a new sermon series called Fruits of the Spirit; a sermon series that is based off of the scripture Galatians 5: 22-23, that names the fruits of the Spirit to be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control;

- Where the idea is that now that you and I have been doing weeks of spiritual pruning together in our previous sermon series, so that we might grow in our faith and spirituality; my preaching goal in this sermon series, is for us to take each spiritual fruit, and examine them weekly, so that we can ensure that they keep growing to their full potential in our lives and the community that surrounds us.
- For our goal as a Church in my eyes, on both the individual and collective level, is to become

effective in these fruits, so that we can achieve the kin-dom on Earth as it is in heaven.

- Therefore, this week we will examine **the bud of love** a little closer.
- And why I thought it helpful to begin with this TikTok clip to begin our conversation together, is because I don't know about you, but this beautiful content creator Tik-toker in our clip by the name of Ileana, I believe captured a very sobering reality for a portion of us.
- For in the video we just witnessed, this young woman in a round-about way, fleshed out for you and I, the common human situation, in a world filled with so much hate;
- That although Jesus Christ, who serves as one part of the Triune God of Love, came to this Earth to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for

the blind and to set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18),

- Ileana essentially is announcing to the world that she has not perceived this message as being true in her life.
- In her video, Ileana is declaring a message that serves as one of the main reasons why the world in my opinion, still needs the Church and the message of the God's unconditional love from Jesus Christ,
- For Ileana is expressing that she does not feel this type of love, that we as the Church declares every week on Sunday morning.
- Ileana has **expressed** that she is exhausted waking up every day, to no calls, texts, or check ups to see how she is doing.
- **She expressed** being tired of driving around for hours, with no one in the passenger seat sitting beside her;

- **Ileana expressed being tired of** wondering what it was about her **that was the problem**, that kept someone else from loving her.
- Ileana confessed in the video, how she was trying to get past this insecurity within her, of never having someone to love her.
- Then Ileana ended her video with a sobering question; why she has not ever been **someone else's first choice?**
- Friends and family, when we bring in our gospel into conversation this morning, of Jesus who was preparing the Disciples for His ascension that would occur 40 days after Easter;
- It is becoming clearer to me, why Jesus left the disciples with the new commandment— to love one another as Christ has loved us;
- And this is because I am convinced with every fiber in my body, that **people like our Tik-Toker**

this morning, is who God most earnestly wanted to set the record straight with;

- **To let them know that** they are indeed God's first choice;
- **To let them know that** they are indeed loved and lovable;
- Furthermore, Ileana I am most certain is not alone in this group of never having really experienced the gift of love.
- For in our 5:30 class, *Applying the Sermon to Life*, many of us shared a common story of knowing what love is from our childhoods and life experiences.
- However, a similar confession like Ileana's, also came from our class, in which the individual gave me the permission to share, of never having experienced what true love is.

- And I have to say, I am so grateful that the individual who shared this, felt safe enough in our small group to disclose this information.
- However, going home that evening, my spirit was troubled, because I realized that we as a world, have really convoluted this concept of love haven't we?
- Furthermore, **I am not so certain** that saying to the sections of society who feel similar to what I have shared, that, "God loves you..." is enough to soothe the brokenhearted..... at least on this side of the Jordan.
- **I am not certain** that scriptures such as *God will never leave nor forsake us* (Deuteronomy 31:6), **is enough to address** the rejected individuals, who have never experienced true love in the land of the living.

- Now don't get me wrong, it is all true, **God does love you and I unconditionally, that will never change;**
- However, my aha moment is that having the knowledge that God loves us is great, **but this is not the entire commandment nor the solution that will get us to greater days ahead in this world.**
- For you see, Jesus too understood how necessary it is for humanity to experience love here on Earth.
- For the reality is that the concept of God and God's love is not something that everyone can grasp fully, especially if they have never experienced the gift of love firsthand.
- A child for instance, who has been abandoned and placed into the foster care system may have a different account of love; regardless of how nurturing those foster homes may be, there is a

significant impact on the child that could leave deep wounds.

- A person who has experienced a series of relationships that have been steeped in violence and emotional abuse, may also have a different account of love, if all they have ever known and been told, is something that is the antithesis of love.
- I suppose what I am suggesting is that if a person's narrative/worldview comes from a place of abuse, violence, mistreatment and more, it makes it that much more difficult to fully comprehend and embrace the love of God.
- To be honest, even being fortunate enough to be raised in a loving home and have loving relationships, could still make it difficult for some of us to fully comprehend and embrace the love that God has for us.

- For think about it; **you and I cannot** physically look into the eyes of God;
- **You and I cannot** audibly hear the voice of God;
- **You and I cannot** tangibly touch the hand of God;
- **You and I cannot** physically smell the essence of God;
- You see, no matter how much you and I try to focus on the bigger picture; that you and I serve a God that loves us infinitely—even if the world may not; it is not realistic from my perspective, for you and I to think that this truth alone, is enough to carry us through our loveless moments on Earth.
- Furthermore, I am convinced that Jesus understood this.
- **I am convinced that the Triune God** understood the need for human beings on Earth to experience love.
- This is not to discount the amazing loving presence of God that some of us may feel when

we worship, pray, meditate and study in God's Word;

- For I have countless stories that I could share where I too have felt the presence and love of the Lord.
- **That feeling that** is like a force that wills us to love beyond ourselves; to do more beyond our capacity;
- **That feeling that** brings us assurance in the depth of our despair....it is real and it is powerful!
- However, there is always going to be that piece of us, that will long for a personal connection, that might accentuate this love in our lives even more so.
- Furthermore, I will suggest again, **that I believe that our heavenly God knows this.**
- Jesus did not expect you and I to have to die in order to experience love.

- This is why Jesus stated, **I give you a new commandment that begins with us loving one another.**
- For the reality is that we as humans need love.
- We as a people crave love!
- Like Deon Jackson once sang as I paraphrase his lyrics just a bit, *You know love makes the world go around!*
- *Love baby, makes the seesaws go up and down;*
- *Love makes the trees grow tall*
- *Love makes a boy and girl, say they feel so fine...*
- *For Everybody needs love!*
- **So this is a long way of my saying that as the human race, we have work to do.**
- For the commandment that Jesus gave the disciples is not one sided.
- **For God has done everything imaginable** to keep God's side of this love commandment intact, to the point of death.

- **God has** communed with the sinners and the tax collectors and treated them with grace.
- **God has expressed** the concern for the marginalized and the oppressed, and declared them to be just as victorious as those who were blessed and privileged enough to be treated with dignity from birth.
- **God has shown** mercy to the afflicted and disabled, and taken action to heal and deliver them.
- But friends, what our gospel was naming to the disciples then and what the gospel is naming to us now, is that God will not always be with us in the flesh;
- In our lifetime up until now, God has never physically been before us in the flesh;
- **So it is up to us** to choose to assume our role in continuing this love covenant that God has established with us.

- **It is up to us** to choose to say yes to this commandment of love and begin doing so in our families, communities and more!
- For I will say it again, this love commandment was never meant to be one sided.
- This love commandment was never meant to only be fulfilled by God.
- **So the question becomes for the purpose of this sermon series, “How do you and I begin to produce the fruit of love, and know that we are doing so according to the standards that God is asking us to?”**
- C.S Lewis in his book *The Four Loves*, really helps us to begin to envision the type of love that Jesus commandment involves.
- So the first love that C. S. Lewis talks about is the Storge – empathy bond
- **Storge** (*storgē*, Greek: **στοργή**) (stor- gay) is liking someone through the fondness of familiarity, family

members or people who relate in familiar ways that have otherwise found themselves bonded by chance.

- An example of this is the natural love and affection of a parent for their child. It is described as the most natural, emotive, and widely diffused of loves.
- It is natural in that it is present without coercion.
- It is emotive because it is the result of fondness due to familiarity.
- Furthermore it is most widely diffused because it pays the least attention to those characteristics deemed "valuable" or worthy of love and, as a result, is able to transcend most discriminating factors.
- This is a long way of saying in plainer terms, that although there are times my children for instance may not like me or vice versa, they will always love

me...because I am their mother and they are my children!

- However I would be remiss if I did not name another truth, that as a society, we already know that improvement can definitely be made in this area of how we show love in our families.
- For as I look at the world around us, I am fairly certain that we all know or even perhaps have lived some of these stories, where this type of nurturing love has been absent from the households some of us were raised in.
- I have been following a case for instance where in Florida, a couple has been recently arrested for starving to death their 9-pound, 2 year old toddler, where reports reveal that the baby couldn't stand and couldn't talk.
- And I have to say that **I just can't imagine or even fathom** what that poor child had to endure.

- **I just can't fathom or imagine** what type of trauma her parents possibly could have endured in their own childhoods/upbringings either; for tragedies like these from my experience, typically come from a cycle of generational familial abuse.
- Therefore as a human race, our first goal to improve on our love towards one another, is to ensure that we are loving towards our family.
- Now grant you, most of us may have not experienced this level of extreme neglect and abuse as this 2 year old baby who lost her life, in our own families;
- However, there is always ways that you and I can improve on how we show our love in our households and immediate relationships that surround us.
- And for those who have mastered the love in this area, that is fantastic!

- However, what I am naming to us all today, is that this is a good area to keep producing love in— our everyday familial relationships.
- For the idea is that if we are producing love in our natural everyday settings, this love has a better chance to expand beyond our individual silos.
- **The second type of love that C.S. Lewis named is the Philia – friend bond**
- **Philia** (Greek: **φιλία**) is the love between friends as close as **siblings** in strength and duration.
- According to Lewis, friendship is the strong bond existing between people who share common values, interests or activities.
- In his book, Lewis immediately differentiates friendship love from the other loves.
- He describes friendship as "the least biological, organic, instinctive, gregarious and necessary...the least *natural* of loves".

- He goes on to say how our species does not need friendship in order to reproduce, but to the classical and medieval worlds, it is a higher-level love, **because it is freely chosen.**
- So in my previous example when I named that my kids don't have to like me and vice versa, but they know that we will always love one another;
- According to Lewis, in friendships, **love is something that we choose.**
- Lewis further explains in his book that true friendships, like the friendship between David and Jonathan in the Bible, are almost a lost art.
- So much so, that he further expressed a strong distaste for the way modern society ignores friendship.
- According to Lewis, the modern world, in comparison, ignores it.

- And if I am honest, there was a time where I too thought that I could survive without having friendships, as long as I had my family.
- There was a time where I too thought I could ignore the fact that I really didn't have a circle of people that I could call my friend.
- As I reflect on my headspace back then, I think why I thought this, was because one of the greatest heartbreaks I have ever had in my life, came from losing a couple of friends in my life from my childhood, that I was never able to repair.
- So from this instance, it made me fearful to really open myself up to others outside of my family, simply because I did not want to go through that emotional toll/trauma all over again.
- It wasn't until I got really active within the ministry many years ago, that I began to discover the

beauty of having friends through fellowship and service.

- Not to mention when Steve and I were gone in Florida, we felt so loved by you all with your calls and texts on my birthday, Mother's Day; not to mention receiving little notes that we were missed, had me touched to the point of tears.
- I tell you it is a true gift to have people who love and appreciate you!
- However, I had to make the first step to choose to invest in these friendships that Lewis is talking about.
- Therefore, I believe like C.S Lewis that this is a great area for us to continue to focus on, if we wish to keep striving to fulfill the commandment of loving one another.

- For when you and I choose to enter into a friendship with another person, we are in effect choosing to love that person.
- Furthermore, when you and I choose to love someone outside of our familial relationships, this is when we really begin to walk into the shoes of Jesus.
- This is when we really begin to model the heart of Jesus;
- Like John 15:16 says, *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, God may give it to you.*
- Therefore, when you and I choose to love, this is what makes opportunities begin to open up within our lives and the world that surrounds us; not to mention it just feels good to be able to call

someone your friend and know that they feel the same way in return!

- **The third love that C.S. Lewis talks about is Eros – romantic love**[\[edit\]](#)
- **Eros** (*erōs*, Greek: ἔρως) for Lewis was love in the sense of "being in love" or "loving" someone.
- According to Lewis, Eros turns the need-pleasure of Venus into the most appreciative of all pleasures; but nevertheless, Lewis warned against the modern tendency for Eros to become a god to people who fully submit themselves to it.
- So to summarize, Eros love can be beautiful;
- However it is also a relationship that always has to be worked on **so that it can remain beautiful.**
- Whenever I counsel couples wishing to be married for instance, I always remind them that the wedding itself lasts about 30 minutes or less.

- So although it is easy to get caught up in the wedding ceremony details in itself, what God is most concerned with and what I as the one officiating these weddings is most concerned with, is helping couples **to focus on a marriage that will last a lifetime.**
- Which involves the couple really learning what type of love is involved with making their commitment **last a life time;**
- This is why I typically use the Love Chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 to serve as the basis for my wedding homilies.
- I particularly love the Message translation of this text that says

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,

*Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.*

- **Finally the last love that Lewis talks about is Agape – unconditional "God" love.**
- **Charity** (*agápē*, Greek: ἀγάπη) is the love that exists regardless of changing circumstances.
- This my friends is the love that God has for us.

- Lewis recognizes this selfless love as the greatest of the four loves, and sees it as a specifically Christian virtue to achieve.
- The chapter on the subject focuses on the need to subordinate the other three natural loves – for as Lewis puts it, "The natural loves are not self-sufficient"^[20] – to the love of God, who is full of charitable love, to prevent what he termed their "demonic" self-aggrandizement.
- Furthermore, agape love is not something you and I will completely master in our lifetime.
- However, working through these other three loves that I have named will get us that much closer to being on the right path.

- **So why I took so much time fleshing out this concept of love, is simply because living in this world today, it seems to me that love is getting drowned out by so much hate.**
- Furthermore, as people of God's love and light, I stopped by to decree and declare **that we cannot give up on love;**
- You see during the time of our gospel, without the love of Christ to sting the disciples into action, **they would have remained poor;**
- **They would have remained** like wingless creatures crawling to the end;
- **They would have remained** helpless to do what they wanted to do and yet could not begin to do, **to be what they saw that they ought to be**—only it was completely out of reach;
- So Christ laid it down what he wished to be the distinguishing mark of his people;

- To instill in them as my great late mentor Junius B. Dotson would affirm to his congregation every Sunday morning as disciple seekers and lovers;
- To remind the people,
- I am a believer, not a doubter,
- I am a winner, not a whiner,
- I am victorious, not victimized,
- I am the head and not the tail,
- I am above and shall never be beneath,
- This is the World of the Lord,
- I can do what God says I can do,
- I can have what God says I can have,
- I can be who God says I can be;
- And all of this was brought to me in the name of Jesus...
- Amen and Hallelujah.....

- You see Church, once we embody this love as God's people, and choose to operate out of this love towards one another...
- The Revelation begins to become clearer from our First Lesson this morning;
- We will see a new heaven and a new earth right before our very eyes;
- For the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more;
- The Holy City, the new Jerusalem and every extension that came from it that includes you and includes me, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband will become evident.
- A loud voice from the throne will be made audible to our ears saying,
- "See the home of God is among mortals where God dwells among us."

- Revealing to us all love in its infinite Glory.
- Revealing to us all a love that can be made possible in the here and the Now and will lead us into our forevermore....
- And all of this is made possible when we choose to love as God first loved us;
- And I wanted to show a visual of what this could look like:
- These are some pictures from the Earth Wind and Fire Concert last night at the Pinnacle Bank Arena that I took, to show what happens when all of us can come together in light and love and just be... even for just a moment....
- It was a glorious night,
- The music from this iconic group, that has stayed together for 50 years in the name of love for music, with the purpose of spreading a loving message to

all, was able to unify us all, and I have to tell you it was breathtaking...

- And just in that moment, I looked my husband in the eyes as we shared a tender kiss of appreciation for one another, as I breathed in the nostalgic air of that evening... and as I looked all around me one final time in that arena as their final song cameI thought to myself... that's Love!
- To the thirsty this morning, To God's first choice, let this Word minister to our hearts, like water as a gift from the spring of the water of life!
- Amen.