

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER, DEEPLY – FROM THE HEART”

1 Peter 1: 17-23

Thought I'd start today's teaching with a love story....A husband and wife were having trouble loving one another because they so often fought over money. The husband never worked and wanted to make money the fast way – So he bought lottery tickets – The wife was money – minded too, but she wanted her husband to work for a good, steady income....Well, after years of putting up with her husband's ways with money, the wife decided to divorce him due to irreconcilable differences.....Surprisingly, a couple of months after the divorce was final, the wife wrote a letter to her ex-husband – “Dearest Donald, no words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since the breakup of our marriage – Please, say you'll take me back! No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me.....I love you! I love you! I love you forever! Yours Truly, Maria.....P.S. – And congratulations on winning the Powerball Lottery! We are living in a world where money determines love! How is your love for the people around you? If you're like most of us, you are comfortable with some of the people you love – But uncomfortable with others. Can you feel that loving some and ignoring the difficult people is good enough? Maybe, a more legitimate question would be, “Pastor Tom, how do I love the difficult people in my life?” Hopefully, we can shed some light on the amazing benefits of loving one another – including the tough ones. In our scripture lesson this morning from 1 Peter 1, Peter is writing to believers who were being persecuted by the Romans – God has given his people new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – Peter is telling them, that since you are now saved – Jesus is giving us 2 commands for the saved: Believe in God and glorify God.....And, love one another, deeply – from the heart. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Jesus' great commission reminds us that the 2 greatest commandments are: To love our God with all our hearts, minds, and souls.....And to love our neighbors as ourselves! And our scripture lesson from 1 Peter 1, verse 21 says, “Through Christ, you believe in God – who raised him from the dead and glorified him – so your faith and hope are in God.” And verse 22 continues, “Now that you have purified yourself by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.” Love is the command here! Love one another – we are called to expand our horizons a bit to love one another – And this is the place where people get hurt the most – It's difficult to love some people! I find it difficult to love those who are trying to kill us – Isis comes to mind – It's tough for me to embrace these terrorists, but I've come to realize that my love reflects Jesus Christ within me – The world will be better able to see Christ in us, when we love one another – John 13:35 tells us, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples – By the way you love one another.” Love is like a lamp that has to keep burning – The two pillars that hold up that lamp, are God's love to us, and our reciprocation of that love by loving God and loving people – All people.....And, if there is going to be love amongst us here at Hoge Memorial Presbyterian Church, we have to receive God's love – And give it back by loving God and loving all people. We can only be the lamp if we accept God's unconditional love! Christ loved us so much, that he died on the cross to save our sins, and we have to give back this love of Christ by loving God and loving all people – God is calling us to love him this morning – with all our hearts, minds, and souls – it is only when we love God that we learn how also to love all people – Because God is love! Love comes from God – it is “THE” bi-product from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God! Love is God's commandment – “As I have loved you, so now you must love one another.” And to believe in the name of Jesus Christ is to love one another like he commanded us! Now, there are some practical ways to love one another – Be authentic! Love one another, deeply – from the heart. Many times our fellowship is superficial in the church and society – We ask questions like, “How are you? Hope you are doing well.” Most of the time our fellowship is a shake of the hand – a smile – and a “How are you?” And we move on....we have no time for genuine love or true fellowship, because we're so busy with many of the things on our lives – Genuine love happens when one takes the time to truly be with others – This time has to be intentional – people are hurting – We're running scared in this COVID 19 pandemic, and we need someone who'll take the time to be genuine with others. If one cannot love someone at home, he or she cannot love our brothers or sisters at church, and we will also fail in our outward love towards others in our society. So, be authentic! Give your time, and understand that time is love – discover common ground – Listen closely and respond – Embrace your differences – Be trustworthy – Don't expect anything in return – Love is not self-seeking – Genuinely complement each other – Help people when needed – And what prevents us from being authentic? Fear – Fear of being previously hurt – Fear of the unknown – Yes, love is risky, but we are called to

love – We all have been hurt and betrayed before – You share something confidential, and it gets publicized – Somebody exploits you – You love someone deeply, and they reject you! You help people in need, but nobody helps you when you need it. Let's be authentic – God is intentional and authentic when he loves us! Be Merciful.....Unfortunately, church is one of the places people get hurt – People have high expectations from believers, and love without barriers can be painful – Many times our memories are full of hurt – And we don't need the reminders of our hatred – Resentments can be something that can last a lifetime, and these resentments cause us to hate people because of the hurt – Love never makes memories out of evils – Love hesitates to believe any rumor – love always forgives – Love never keeps accounts of resentments – Our hurt from our past should not stop us from loving – We don't quit driving because of an accident, they happen – We don't quit loving if someone hurts us – You keep on loving – We must learn to give mercy for the ones who hurt us. We have hurt others – Through broken promises – Unknowingly or knowingly – And we expect to be forgiven – We expect mercy from others – So we need to be willing to give mercy – Be authentic and merciful – Have motivation for love – There are benefits for loving others – There are promises for the ones who are loving.....This is how we know what love is – Christ died on the cross for us! We should be willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Children of God, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions on truth. This assures our salvation – When a brother or sister is in need – We chip in to help – That proves the assurance of our salvation. That proves we are truly God's children – God know the secrets of our hearts condemn us and we stand guilt of not loving one another – Love assures our salvation – God's spirit abides in us! The one who keeps God's commands lives in God, and God in them. The story about Ted Stallard undoubtedly qualifies of a story about "One of the least." Turned off by school, very sloppy in appearance – Expression-less – Unattractive – Even his teacher, Miss Thompson, enjoyed bearing down her red pen – as she placed X's besides his many wrong answers. If only she had studied his records more carefully – They read: 1st grade: Ted shows promise with his work and attitude, but has poor home situation. 2nd grade: Ted could do better. Mother seriously ill. Receives little help from home. 3rd grade: Ted is good boy but too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year. 4th grade: Ted is very slow, but well-behaved. His father shows no interest whatsoever. Christmas arrived – the children piled elaborately wrapped gifts on their teacher's desk. Ted brought one too, it was wrapped in brown paper and help together with scotch tape. Miss Thompson opened each gift, as the children crowded around to watch. Out of Ted's package fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half of the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume. The children began to snicker, but she silenced them by splashing some of the perfume on her wrist, and letting them smell it. She put the bracelet on too. At the day's end, after the other children had left, Ted came by the teacher's desk and said, "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother. And the bracelet looks real pretty on you too, I'm glad you like my presents." He left, and Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her and to change her attitude. The next day, the children were greeted by a reformed teacher – One committed to loving each of them, especially the slow-ones – especially Ted. Surprisingly, or maybe not surprisingly, Ted began to show great improvement – He actually caught up with most of the students and even passed a few. Time came and went – Miss Thompson heard nothing from Ted for a long time, then one day, she received this note: Dear Miss Thompson: I wanted you to be the first to know, I will be graduating second in my class: Love, Ted: Four years later, another note arrived: Dear Miss Thompson: They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it, Love Ted: And four years later: Dear Miss Thompson: As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would've sat if she were alive. You are the only family I have now, as my Dad died last year. Miss Thompson attended the wedding, and sat where Ted's mother would have sat. The compassion she had shown that young man entitled her to that privilege. Let's have some real courage, and start giving to "One of the least." He may become a Ted Stallard. Even if that doesn't happen, we will have been faithful to the One who has always treated us – as unworthy as we are – like very special people! And they know we are Christians by our love, by our love.....And they know we are Christians by our love! So, love one another, deeply – from the heart – And return the love Christ so freely gave us when he died for us to forgive our sins! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.....Amen!