

A Epiphany 6 2/11-12/17 Ephesians 4:32-5:2

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.^[a] Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us^[b] and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

I love this verse from Ephesians and am glad that you picked it as one of the supporting texts for today's Love Service.

Love is a verb. It's a doing thing and as we listened to today's lessons it was like a **to-do list** of loving actions.

- Free the wrongly imprisoned.
- Share your food with the hungry.
- Give shelter to the homeless.
- Give clothes to those who need them.
- Help your relatives in need.
- Be kind and compassionate. Forgive each other.
- Carry each other's burdens
- Do right; seek justice; defend the oppressed;
- Take up the cause of the fatherless.
- Plead the case of the widow.

Already that is quite a checklist of things to do, and there is more!

Love is far more than having a soft and warm spot in our heart for someone. Love is a verb means we are to do it and when we start thinking about what that means, we might get overwhelmed but God doesn't expect more from us than he has already given us. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians wrote: *be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us.*

It all begins with Christ's love for us.
That's why at every Baptism we sing:

Jesus loves me, this I know,

We get to know Jesus' love before we do it.

And then we sing ***for the Bible tells me so.***

The Bible is a wonderful place to learn about God's love.

There are so many stories that tell us about the amazing ways God shares love with us.

The story I just read of the Good Samaritan is a great example.

There are other ways though that we can learn about God's love. We could sing

...for my Mother tells me so

...for my teacher tells me so

...for my grandpa shows me so

...for my friends show me so.

We were talking about this on Wednesday in Bible Study and Vernice Knutson showed us something she learned in Bible School. It was so cute we thought we would share it.
video

I gave out copies of this to the children and there are some in the back for our young at heart.

(If time, turn to your neighbor and tell about an experience you had that was love shared. Big or small.) Then share these.

Jesus' love is not just something we hear or read about.

It's something we know through experience, even long before we know the words. For example, children know that their grandparents are special, without ever being sat down and told. (Mary Hughes on a Christian Ed Tape.)

Maybe that's why St. Paul tells us to be as beloved children of God. Children are best at experiencing.

We are called to experience God's love, not just study it. So, you and me and every person in this room, we are all called to be a loved child of God.

Now, as children, we are not to be naïve and simplistic! Rather, we are to be fresh, innovative and free of inhibitions with regard to our loving relationship with God and with others.

When I walk through our Sunday School or Confirmation classes I see God's love experienced
...in the smiles and laughter of new friends
...in the sweet taste of apple juice or donut holes.
...in the gentle nudge of a friendly visiting puppy.
We can learn to share God's love. Be imitators, the text goes on to say. And that is exactly what Kids do best. Imitate.

Imitation here means more than mindless copying...monkey see...monkey do.
It is more like practicing until it becomes part of our life.

Imitation also implies that we have already witnessed the real thing first.
We have experienced it, lived it, felt it firsthand.
And so we practice what we have already witnessed and then share what we have already been given.

Love is a verb.
If we have received God's forgiveness, we can share God's forgiveness by forgiving another..

Love is a verb.
If we have been challenged by God and then been given the strength to meet that challenge, we may be called to

challenge others to serve or to be more just or to defend the oppressed and then we also need to support them to meet the challenge laid before them.

Love is a verb
If we have been blessed with special gifts, we then share God's love by sharing those gifts.

Love is a verb.
I talked to a shut-in today who is now confined to her chair. She is blind and unable to walk by herself. She is on hospice and she said, what am I able to do. What is my purpose. My answer to that question is always prayer. Prayer is doing something too...and it may inspire others to do what we cannot.

Of course, that's what today is all about.
Sharing what we have already be given by doing.
LWR is one great way to do that.
Giving to the noisy offering is another.

And of course this love stuff doesn't end here today.
We come here to get filled up to overflowing so that when we go out that door, we are overflowing with love to share and spread all around by what we do.

And that's being an imitator of God's love.
Imitating means we share what we have received and tell what we have witnessed.
That is also what it means to be a beloved child of God.

God's love is a verb.
This is the Good News of the Gospel.