

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, 9/10

God's Work Our Hands

"Love is An Action" based on Romans 13:8-14

It is good for us to be here!

Owe no one anything... except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. These are Paul's words from Romans 13:8.

Owe no one anything. What do you think of when you hear these words? Possibly the debts that are hanging over your head?

Jeranna and I took Dave Ramsey's financial peace university 16 years ago to learn how to live debt free lives and become more generous. The class seeks to put forth a model of Biblical money management. We still are working the baby steps after all these years. But in the class, we found out we weren't alone in our struggles to get on the same page financially. We saw it as marriage counseling.

Yes, the Apostle Paul is saying in Romans 13:8-14 that believers should live debt-free in all aspects of your life... except with respect to one... love.

And it is true, you can pay off your credit cards, or home loan to the bank, or your taxes to the government. But one debt you can never pay off in full as a Christian is to love one another.

As a Christian, you cannot say, "I have paid my dues". I am now debt free when it comes to loving the neighbor.

Love is the basic requirement for the Christian who lives under the grace of Christ... to love your neighbor as yourself. And I know a lot of people struggle with the as yourself part. What does that mean? How can I love my neighbor if I am struggling to love myself. First, know how much God loves you just as you are. Second, maybe think of it this way... we do put ourselves first most, or all of the time... don't we? We try to secure food, clothing, and shelter for ourselves and our families. We do stand up for justice when our loved ones are wronged. To love our neighbors as ourselves is to want for them what we want for ourselves.

Unfortunately love in our world has come to be identified as a feeling. It is a romanticized love that we see on TV or in movies. That is not what the New Testament means by love. In this text the Greek word for love is Agape. Agape is God's unconditional love for the world. It is the love God has for us regardless of how good we are or how well we live up to God's expectations. God loves us simply because we are part of God's good creation. And God wants abundant life for all.

I don't think God gets a warm fuzzy feeling when God thinks about me. But, I do know how God feels about us because of what God has done for us. God's love is an action. God gave God's only begotten son for our redemption. God's love went through the cross. God's actions show us what love is.

For Paul and the New Testament, love does not center on emotions, but on actions. "To love someone is to actively promote that person's good."

New Testament Love acts for the good of the other. That is what this day and hopefully every day is about as Christians... God's work, Our Hands. Whether it be tying quilts, building houses in Guatemala, packing the hope fridge, cleaning out a bird sanctuary, beautifying our grounds, or packing Lutheran World Relief kits. These small actions are a response to God's love for us and for the world.

When we follow the commandments to not commit adultery, to not murder with words or actions, to not steal, to not covet, means that in order to love another person, you cease these harmful actions and do what promotes that person's good instead.

Jesus, God in human flesh, demonstrates this love in all he says and does. In our Gospel for today, Jesus reminds us that forgiveness and reconciliation are reflective of God's love. If a person sins against you, go and talk to them and tell them how they hurt you or others. The goal is to restore them to the community.

Finally Romans 13, Paul uses a practical metaphor of putting on Christ like you would clothing. He calls it the armor of light. In the morning, when we wake from sleep, we choose what to wear. Putting on Christ is knowing that you are a baptized child of God, and that

you are already loved. Putting on Christ means you get rid of that old clothing or vices like reveling, drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarreling, and jealousy. Putting on Christ means sharing God's love in action using the gifts God gave you. Amen!