

Sermon ✝ May 2, 2021

1 John 4:7-21.

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In the musical, *"My Fair Lady,"* Eliza is being courted by a fellow named, Freddy, who writes to her daily of his love for her. Eliza's response to his notes is to finally cry out in frustration:

"Words! Words! Words! I'm so sick of words! . . .

And then she sings:

"Don't talk of stars burning above,

If you're in love, show me!

Don't talk of love lasting through time.

Make me no undying vow. Show me now!"

Love. It is something which we all need. To quote another song, "love makes the world go 'round." And I'm not just talking about "romantic love", although that's great . . . the ancient Greeks used the word *Eros* . . . to describe sensual love. The New Testament was originally written in Greek and the ancient Greek language actually had four distinct words for love . . . *Eros* being but one.

The kind of love I'm talking about today morning is the unique love that bonds us together as humans. The Greeks referred to this kind of love as *Agape*. The early Christians appropriated the word *Agape* to express the unconditional love of God. And to quote yet another song, *"What the world needs now is love . . . it is the one thing that there is too little of . . ."*

We all hunger for love and acceptance from God and from the universe and from each other. Our sharpest hunger is to be loved and to be allowed to love someone.

1st John reminds us that *"we love because God first loved us."* So . . . given this, how do we satisfy our sharpest hunger—the need to be loved and to love someone.

To learn to read when another is asking for love is not easy. Few people come right out and ask for love. More often than not, we reveal our need to be loved—indeed our deepest desire to be loved—through our anger.

So often it is anger, not love, that we see in one another. Yet, the anger may be just a smoke-screen . . . a cry for help. We need . . . if we are able . . . when we receive the anger . . . to read it carefully. It might be a cry for help . . . a cry for love.

The late, Roman Catholic spiritualist, Louis Evely, has written about our need to be loved. He worded it like this:

"Loving people means summoning them forth with the loudest and most insistent of calls; it means stirring up in them a mute and hidden being who can't help leaping at the sound of your voice; a being so new that, even those who carried him didn't know him, yet so authentic that they can't fail to recognize him once they discover him."

How do we summon up in one another that hidden and mute being which is authentic? We do it by simply looking at everyone as an authentic human being . . . knowing every person as one who needs love. It isn't something that they should have to tell us . . . we should know . . . only we don't always.

There is a story about a mother and father and their young boy who went to eat in a restaurant. Once seated at their table, the waitress arrives pad in hand. The parents order.

The boy tells the waitress, *"I would like a hot dog please."*

"No hot dog!" his mother said. Then looking right past the boy to the waitress she says, *"Bring him potatoes, beef, and a vegetable."*

The waitress then looks at the boy and asks, *"What do you want on your hotdog?"*

"Ketchup lots of ketchup--and a glass of milk," he replies.

"Coming right up! ", says the waitress.

The boy turns to his parents, *"Gee, she thinks I'm real!"*

To be sure, I'm sure the parents were probably not too excited about this exchange. However, we do need to see each other as being real persons. And when we begin to see each other in this way . . . we see somebody who is starving for love. We must learn how to read it when other people are asking for love; we must learn how to ask for it ourselves.

It is not easy . . . to ask for love. There is a special grace in being taught how to be loved. There is no way to ask for love without being open enough to risk being hurt.

But some people have been hurt so many times that they've built a protective cover. Their words and body language clearly state, *"You can only get so close to me."* As long as we protect ourselves in such a manner, we cannot be fully loved.

In a counseling situation, how can we ask someone who has been open and hurt, open again and hurt again, open again and hurt again . . . to take one more risk? But if one is going to be open to the possibility of love, there is also the possibility of being hurt and disappointed.

We also need some kind of test which enables us to know when we are loving and not just being selfish about our love. This includes the entire business of doing something just for show or "because it looks good". If we only give love in order to receive it, there is a danger that it becomes self-centered. How can we be safe from that?

Well, that's what the whole Gospel is about. We have, in Jesus, ways to check out all of our relationships to see if they are authentic. We don't have to like everybody, but we are asked to love them.

I know . . . its sounds like the opposite of how we would normally think about such things. Every person is a child of God. That means that everyone is our sister and brother, in Christ, just in the same way we may have biological brothers and sisters. You may not like your own sisters and brothers, but you cannot avoid who they are and who you are.

That is how we test our love. It is in what we do to one another. We must, first of all, acknowledge that we are sisters and brothers . . . not because we accept one another . . . but because we have been accepted.

Let us pray . . .

We are grateful, O God, for the growth that comes into our own lives, and the maturity in those moments when, however feebly, we are able to live like this.

We have come to know this as living in Christ.

We are judged by the times we could have . . . but didn't.

Forgive us for those, and continue to love us; trace again that lost image in us which is your own image in Christ. Amen.

