

Three Big Words

John 15:9-17
1 John 4:7-12

Crossroads Christian Church
May 10, 2015
Easter 6 – Mother’s Day

Since my sermon title is Three Big Words, let me start with three big words—antidisestablishmentarianism; supercalifragilisticexpialidocious; and supralapsarianism. Well, no. Those words are long enough, but they aren’t big enough. The big words that I have in mind are short, —only three, two, and four letters long, but important words. We’ll get to them later. First of all, let’s consider Mother’s Day. Don’t worry. It’ll all connect eventually. I hope.

Mother’s Day is a tender day. It’s tender in two senses—in one sense, it’s tender as in “warm and tender,” sweet and sentimental. In another, for many people, it’s tender like a healing wound. Touch it and there’s an ouch. That’s true for those whose mothers have died, and who are still dealing with grief. It’s true for those who are estranged from their mothers, who are emotionally separated from them. It’s true of young women whose mothers say, “Now when are you going to have babies and make me a grandma?” It’s true of women who desperately want children but can’t have them. It’s true of women who become pregnant when they don’t want to be, and have tough choices to make. It’s true of women whose children are terribly sick, and who struggle with the upcoming reality of their child’s death or of chronic illness and dependence. Ouch. Like Christmas and many other holidays, Mother’s Day has a painful downside for many, many people. But it’s still appropriate to honor the role that mothers fill in our society, our church, and our families, and we can each honor the role of our own mothers.

In Mother’s Day sermons, I often tell a story about my own mom. She was shy and didn’t go to church much—we were poor, and she had some physical problems that made her shy, so she always worried whether she would fit in. But when I got turned on to the Christian faith, she gave me her

full support, love, and encouragement. To her friends, I became “my son, who is studying to be a minister.” She told me more than once that when she would be visiting with card-playing friends, and the subject would turn to religion, she would tell them, “I have a sermon, and it’s only three words long.” When they would ask what it was, she’d hold up three fingers and say “God is love.” Not bad theology, Mom. Not bad at all. What was more important, she lived like she believed it. She was a kind, loving, caring wife and mother.

So those are the three big words—God is love. Let’s explore the scriptures today, to see what John, the writer, and Jesus had in mind. First we’ll look at the letter of John. John’s letters, or epistles, are, in a sense, theological and spiritual meditations on themes from the Gospel of the same name. They weren’t written in a vacuum, though, they were written to help young churches come to grips with what it means to be Christian. In a culture where there were many deities, many cults, many beliefs, what was distinctive about Christianity? It was God’s amazing love for the world. God’s nature is to love. And God’s desire is for us to love God and to love one another as God has loved us.

And these words were reflections on what Jesus himself taught in the Gospel. Over the past few weeks, we’ve been looking at what Jesus taught about himself and God through the lens of Easter. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. And just after that, Jesus is saying, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; remain in my love.” Then he calls them friends—not servants, but friends. They were friends, and they were worth dying for—and so are we. And Jesus wants us to make God’s love our home—that’s part of what “remain in my love” means—we abide there, as the older translations put it—we take up residence in love. We live and move and have our being in love. That love guides us in our decision making and in our attitudes. We don’t just pay lip service to it, we live it, and we know that if we fail, God loves us still and draws us back into relationship again. God’s love is the most

real thing in the world. Love is what God is all about and what God wants us to be all about.

Jesus told his disciples to be conspicuous for their love—to let their love stand out, to shine as a light in a dreary world. You know how when you see brown uniforms and brown trucks you think of UPS, when you see golden arches you think of McDonalds, when you see the peacock you think of NBC? When you see people acting in love, you should see the logo of a Christian, of a disciple. When Jan and I delivered many, many pounds of foodstuff to the Caseyville Food Bank, food that you contributed, love touched the lives of hungry people.

Why should Jesus give them that commandment, to love one another? Partly it was survival. They would need each other's love and support to make it through the terrible trials ahead. We need that love in Christian community today to make it through our daily trials. But there's more to it than that. Jesus reminding the disciples to love one another is asking them to be consistent with the true nature of God. Earlier in John's gospel, in Chapter 3, came the gospel within a gospel, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son." And throughout the Gospels and letters, we get reminded of the two great commandments—to love God with all our mind, soul, heart and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We are called to love because by loving we participate in the very nature of God. Love should be our trademark, our logo. Love should be the way we tear down the barriers that divide us from each other and from God.

On Mother's Day we celebrate the great and powerful love that our mothers have for us, but we remember that this love is only a reflection of God's love. God's love holds on and never, never lets go. That's how deep it is.

Can you tell we are Christians by our love? It's easier to love people who are just like us—same race, same class, same family, same pew—but how do we reach out in love to people who make us uncomfortable? How do we live out

God's love to people who are different from us? Maybe it's at our very discomfort zones where God is calling us to grow.

We, as Christians, are invited, no, commanded--to love and to care. And that takes us back to mothers, doesn't it?—those in the literal sense of the word who have biological children, but also others, who are caring, nurturing people. Let me close with a Prayer for Women, that Bruce Calkins, another interim pastor, adapted from the work of Miriam Teresa Winters.

Let us pray for women who laugh and for women who weep.
Let us pray for women who are leaders in their jobs and professions and for women who work behind the scenes.
Let us pray for women who are scholars and artists
and for women who have never been given a book or a paint brush.

Let us pray for women who help their countries to win wars
and for women who help their countries avoid wars.

Let us pray for women who bring God's comfort into homes
and hospitals
and for women who cry out for comfort.

Let us pray for women who reach out to feed and nurture
others and for women who are hungry and malnourished.

Let us pray for women who have brought new life into the
world and for women who have given birth to words and
ideas and music.

May God's creativity and comfort accompany you all the way
home. Amen.¹

By Michael E. Dixon

¹ This prayer was inspired by Miriam Therese Winter's book "Woman Word, a

Feminist Lectionary and Psalter" published by Crossroad, 2001, by Bruce Calkins, Interim Pastor, as quoted on

Midrash