

## **“Genuine Love, True Love”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for our meditation this morning is the epistle reading, Romans 12:9-21, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Amen. So stands God’s Word. Amen.

What in the world is Paul talking about here? Love is love isn’t it? Paul says, “Let your love be genuine. Be sincere in our love and put that love, genuine love into action. After-all aren’t we told that the fulfillment of the commandments is love. Listen to these words from 2 John 1:6; “And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.” But we always come back to that first sentence, “let your love be genuine”. For sinful men and women that’s a hard thing to manage. We hear a

lot about genuine love, true love in our world today. Isn't there only one true instance of true, pure genuine love? Of course you don't have to think very hard to remember what that is. While we were still sinners, His enemies, Jesus died for us!

Really what is genuine love? What is love? Even forgetting whether or not it is actually genuine. The idea of love is to care about someone to the extent that you put that person before yourself. You put the welfare and the needs of someone else over and above your own welfare and your own needs.

That is what Jesus did when it came to showing genuine love for us. He set aside the powers and privileges of being God to be born as a man, or as the Scriptures say, in the form of a servant. He does not come in glory and majesty but He comes meek and lowly being born in a manger of all places. He does not come in pomp and ceremony with the worship of the crowds but to the worship of lowly shepherds. Then He does not come to set up an earthly kingdom that He can rule but to suffer and die so that we who believe in Him might become a part of the heavenly kingdom of God. Jesus did not come for what He could get; He came for what He could give. He gave His life. Jesus gave His life for us, for you and for me. He did this not because we were already His friends and because we loved Him but on the contrary; we hated Him and we were His enemies.

We were God's enemies because of our sins. We were and really still are unable to love fully and completely because of sin. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned; we human beings became unable to truly, genuinely love. We do the best we can but it just doesn't make the grade. The commandment to love, and if we could really accomplish it, would fulfill all of the others. We hear it from Jesus Himself in Mark 12:28-31, "And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another,

and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” But again we just don’t do either one of those do we?

We don’t love God fully and completely and we don’t love our neighbor’s as we love ourselves. Look out for number one is what the world tells us to do. That number one is not our neighbor, it’s us. As sinful human beings we love nothing and no one as much as we love ourselves. Isn’t that kind of love of self idolatry, because we do very often put ourselves before God?

So Paul brings into play the idea of letting our love be genuine. The note in the Lutheran Study Bible on this verse says, “without hypocrisy” this is the kind of love that is not concerned with what we will receive in return. In Luke 14:12-14 Jesus says, “He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” So often we are only motivated to love those who can love us back and those we see as being worthy of our love. Or we love those who can do something for us in return, but what kind of love is that? That could also be defined as a love of self because ultimately it is our own self interest we are looking out for not that of our neighbor. That is not really genuine love is it? But time

and time again that is the kind of love that we show for one another. That can even be the kind of love that we express for God. We can love God when things are going well but then we get angry with God when they're not. When maybe a pandemic affects our daily lives, when we have to wear masks everywhere we go (which, by the way, shows love for the neighbor), and some of the luxuries we enjoy are in short supply.

Jesus showed us God's perfect love in loving us not merely when it proved to be inconvenient but by giving His life for us. He gave His life for us when we were incapable of showing love for Him. With His shed blood Jesus made complete atonement for our all of our sins, including our failure to love God and our neighbor. Jesus showed this love for us even knowing that many would reject it. His is a genuine love, a love without hypocrisy, the love of God for His creation in order to restore them to Him; to buy back something that in reality already belonged to Him.

In this letter Paul is writing to believers, writing to forgiven, redeemed people of God who only because of that fact are capable of even attempting this kind of love. When we are busily trying to work to earn our own salvation we don't have the ability or the time to love; not God or our neighbor. Because of Christ's atoning suffering, death and glorious resurrection we are now free to love God and our neighbor because we are not worried about return or reward because we have already received the most wonderful reward we could ever be given, forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven with God.

We can hate what is evil because in Christ we have died to sin. We can hold fast to what is good because Christ holds fast to us. We can love one another with brotherly affection and outdo one another in showing honor because of the affection and honor that our Brother Jesus the Christ has shown to us. We can serve the Lord without sloth and

with a fervent spirit because our spirit is refreshed by God's Word of forgiveness and live to us for Jesus sake. We can rejoice in our hope and be patient in any tribulation and constant in prayer because our hope is in Christ and the Cross and the promise that He has gone to prepare a place for us. We can supply one another's needs because we have a God who has supplied all of our needs but most especially our need of forgiveness of our load of sin. Genuine love, real love? It is the love of God for us in and through His Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Truly we are forgiven and we live because of His love for us and we love because He first loved us. Amen.

The peace of God that passes all understanding forever keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.