

Laurentian Wesleyan Church
Sunday, January 24, 2016
Series: Take What You Need
Sermon: Love

Opening Illustration:

Hannah moved to New York City after graduating from college. She thought she was going to walk straight into her dream life. That didn't happen. In fact, it was basically the opposite. She found herself grappling with depression, unable to tell her family and friends because she was so ashamed. "Depression is a scary thing", Hannah recounts, "depression, when you make yourself journey through it alone, is terrifying."

So Hannah started to get really honest in the pages of her notebook. And eventually those thoughts morphed into letters and she found herself ripping out and leaving all over New York City for people to find. She left them everywhere: Coffee shops. Libraries. Coat pockets in department stores. She liked to imagine who might find those letters.

Somehow that idea took on a life of its own after she talked about it online. Her email inbox filled with the most heartbreaking stories she'd ever encountered after she shared a simple question: "Do you need someone to write you a love letter today? Just ask."

That one question changed her life forever as she spent the next year writing hundreds of love letters to strangers in all parts of the world. She started a site called "moreloveletters.com" You can share why someone needs to feel loved and the website then blesses individuals-young and old-with bundles of love letters during a time in need.

Hannah says, "We basically want to create the most miraculous experience for people when they need it most: hundreds of letters of support and encouragement showing up at someone's door all because someone in their own life loved them enough to just ask for those love letters."

Have you ever been in that place? Needing love? I think we all have.

Today we're starting a five week series called "Take What You Need". We're going to focus on five fruits of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5:22-23a, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control..." Today we're talking about love. We all need love. Imagine a life without love. Sadly, some of you don't have to imagine. You have known times when love was not abundant in your life. But could we not agree, that love is a necessity of life. As important as food and water.

Do you know God loves you? He does. Hear it today, it's for you, "God-loves-you". Before we jump into our main scripture today, I want to share one of my favourites. It's from 1 John 3:1. And it tells you today that God's love is abundant, personal & certain.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us **that we should be called children of God!** And that is what we are!" -1 John 3:1, NIV

If we want to know love, and share love, we need to look to the ultimate source of love...God. I invite you to turn to today's scripture in 1 John 4, starting at verse 7.

Scripture: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."

1 John 4:7 NIV

First, you don't have a choice.

Loving Others Isn't Optional.

But He shows us how.

Scripture: "Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

1 John 4:7b-8 NIV

True love comes from God. It is a window into the character of God. Is the love you have for your spouse or children pure and true and have there been moments of complete clarity where you know this is good and right? Then we have a tiny glimpse of God. As we love...and choose to love others...we can know God better.

The same is true in reverse, isn't it? If you don't love, you don't know God because it's just part of who God is.

But God doesn't just "do" love in His actions. He "is" love. It's in His character.

Some might find this contradictory. After all, the Bible speaks about God being many things. I like how one commentator put it. "It is true that the words 'God is love' mean not that loving is 'only one of God's many activities' but rather that 'all his activity is loving activity and that, therefore, [for instance], if He judges, He judges in love.'" (Tyndale Commentary)

When we love, we know Him. And when we know Him, we know He is love.

Illustration:

I had a french teacher in high school who I thought was mean, at first. I arrived for her class on the first day right after Phys Ed class, and the door was locked. I was just a few minutes late. I knocked and found out quite quickly that she was strict, worked us hard and expected a lot. But I also found out that her motivation was not to be mean, but to help us accomplish our best. It wasn't until we as a class got to know her that we understood this. That's what motivated her.

This is important. We need to know today that **God IS love**. It influences and taints how we read God's Word if we don't know this.

Let me give you an example from **Exodus 33:15f**.

Moses asked God for His presence to go with them, but more than that, Moses asked to see God's glory. God decided to grant Moses' request.

"And the Lord said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence...But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.'"

Exodus 33:19-20 NIV

If we stopped at that verse and took it alone, you could believe that God is cruel. That He would kill anyone who saw His glory. But reading it that way forgets His character. Scripture continues...

“Then the Lord said, ‘There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.’”

Exodus 33:21-22 NIV

If we approach scripture knowing that God is love...then it helps us know Him. It is also a truth about God that He is holy. He is bigger than us. Too much for us to understand or comprehend. He is perfect power and might. Justice and authority. Sovereign Lord of all. Could it be that when a mere man like Moses sees God in all of His majesty and power that it is overwhelming to the senses. It confronts our unrighteousness or un-rightness, of which we share with Moses. And it is a truth of existence that we could not live or exist in the face of the one true and living God in our sinful state. God is all those things I've mentioned, but, He is also love.

He came as near as He dare without causing Moses to die from exposure, so to speak. He provided a cleft or crevice in the rock to protect him. He gave Moses a glimpse of His undiminished glory. I see a God of relationship, care and love in this passage, because scripture teaches that love is a character trait of God. I believe often we can find God's love in the middle of those times when we question and wonder. If we'll only get our eyes off of what we perceive to be unfair or unjust.

We can trust that His actions are driven by love even when we don't completely understand.

How does He show His love to you and I?

Scripture: (1 John 4:9-10). “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

1 John 4:9-10 NIV

God's love is why you and I are here. Not just in church today, but here in this world. Why we exist. He wants relationship with us. But our sin. Our trying to live life on our own, our way by our rules, causes a rift between God and us. Not because God is mean, but because it goes against His nature.

God's love took the initiative and came to you, first.

2. Love Goes First.

Jesus came as an atoning sacrifice. As a ransom for our sin. God's love wouldn't let His relationship with his creation, us, be broken.

So many love songs talk about "I would climb the highest mountain, I would cross the raging sea and would battle a thousand warriors or journey a thousand miles." And usually those words are hollow. Too many misuse the word love. Instead of the selfless thing that God has shown, it because all about me. Self-centred, pleasure seeking, manipulative. And you could

say, "put your money where your mouth is. Don't just talk about how much you love, do something about it."

That's what God did! His love wasn't just words, it was action. So what does He ask us to do? The writer is assuming you've already received this love. Have you? We're going to give you a chance to do that later in the service. Our response to God's love is found in verse 11.

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

1 John 4:11 NIV

3. Love One Another

His love desires to be reciprocated, but it doesn't have to be. His love is unconditional. I'm not responsible for your response to my love. I'm just responsible to love. You may even take advantage of it. I'm still told to love you.

What does that look like?

Love Doesn't Wait to Be Loved to Love

"No one who has been to the cross and seen God's immeasurable and unmerited, [undeserved] love displayed there can go back to a life of selfishness." (Tyndale Commentary).

Verse 12 says, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

1 John 4:12 NIV

I want us to be reminded that the original readers of this were believers, Christians. Could it be that an unbelieving world will see God when His people love one another. God lives in that kind of environment.

**Love starts with God and His character,
is shown through His Son
And made complete in the Church, among His people.**

But in this verse, I also hear a caution. "But if we *do not* love one another, God *does not* live in us and his love *is not* made complete in us."

So are you growing in love?

"If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love. Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, Doesn't have a swelled head, Doesn't force itself on others, Isn't always "me first," Doesn't fly off the handle, Doesn't keep score of the sins of others, Doesn't revel when others grovel, Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, Puts up with anything, Trusts God always, Always looks for the best, Never looks back, But keeps going to the end.

Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

...

But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.”

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 MSG

What do you need today?

Are you in need of love?

Come, take what you need.