

Learning to Love

by Stewart Ruch

The sermon explores the profound nature of love as taught by Jesus, emphasizing the importance of choosing the best for others at a personal cost.

Duration: 24:27

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17, John 13:1-17, John 13:34-35

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, Bishop Stuart Ruch explores the concept of love and its challenges. He emphasizes that love is not as simple as it seems, using a personal anecdote to illustrate this point. Jesus's command to love one another is a radical and disconcerting idea, as it requires choosing to love and engaging one's will. The sermon encourages listeners to develop a clear understanding of what it means to love as Jesus loved, and to actively choose to love others.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon, Learning to Love, is by Bishop Stuart Ruch and is part four of The Resurrection School, Learning New Life from Jesus. It is quite an emotional, it's quite an intellectual, quite a spiritual challenge to get our thinking and to get our hearts around the idea of love.

It's one of those very simple words, it's got four letters, and yet in many ways that word seems impermeable. It's like you can't access what it means. It's a word so offspoken, applied in so many different ways, that to really get our arms around and actually enter into this idea of love one another can be very difficult.

If I were to ask you just to give me sort of your first push, your first blush on what is love, my guess is you would give me something, as I would probably give you if I were asked right away, along the lines of it's a connection of great intensity. Love has something to do with connection. It's a connection of great intensity.

And then perhaps if you backed off from it and thought about it a little bit more you might say, no, you know, there's two parts to the kind of love I'm thinking about, two C's. It actually has to do with what I learned when I am up at Honey Rock with many of our Wheaton College students. It can start with a CFA, a cross from afar that becomes a connection of great intensity, at least hoped for, and that this is sort of

what love is about.

And actually love is inclusive of that. Love can certainly involve the romantic realities of crushes from afar. Love certainly has something to do with connections of great intensity.

But it's actually the work of the Christian to understand what love means as lived by Jesus Christ. It's very key to your work. It's key to the development of your belief in Jesus.

It's to come to a very clear, robust, yet simple understanding of what it means when Jesus radically says to these Jewish men who had been following the way of Yahweh, following the way of the Ten Commandments, memorizing them, saying them daily, sometimes several times a day, to say a new commandment, a new commandment I give to you, love one another. There would have been no other way for Jesus to highlight what He was about to say more prominently, more radically, more disconcertingly than to say a new commandment, colon. What is He going to say? How could He dare give a new commandment? Love one another as I have loved you.

We similarly, to my opening remarks, get a two-part process of learning how to love from Jesus. Indeed, two C's as well. When Jesus says love one another, at the heart of what He is saying is choose.

Engage your will. Engage your actions. Choose the best for another.

Choose the most glorious. Choose the most enriching for another. Choose the best for another.

If we were to trade out love one another, trade in choose the best for another, we get closer to the heart of what Jesus taught. And that is the first movement of love, the first learning of love that Christians are brought into. But that isn't the fulfillment of love as Jesus will display and teach.

Indeed, the second C of learning how to love is not only choosing the best for another, but it's costly choosing the best for another. Choosing the best for another when it isn't the best for you, necessarily. Choosing the best for another when your best and the other's best come into deep and profound and emotionally painful conflict.

When actually loving another comes at great cost to you, sacrifice to you, surrender to you, the letting go of dreams and hopes perhaps. Jesus says love one another as I have loved you. Choose in a costly way the best for another.

Now you may be listening and still going, really? That's it? I mean, that's all there is to it? That isn't that hard, to which I would say, you're amazing. You don't need the next 20 minutes. It's really hard.

Love is harder than it looks. An example from last week in my life. So Kath and I were getting ready to turn the lights out, call it a day.

We were going to bed later than we had planned to go to bed, which is every single night for us. And we were doing our reading time, and so we were both reading, and we're kind of talking about the day, and she's asking me questions, and I'm not answering them very well because I'm too tired. And then we're about to turn the lights out, and she goes, oh, I forgot my chapstick downstairs.

I need my chapstick before I go to sleep. No, she was not hinting, but she says that she's just thinking about her chapstick, and I thought, I should go get her chapstick, but I don't want to. I'm reading right now.

I'm settled in. I'm very tired. I've been working a lot.

I don't want to get Katharine's chapstick. She's not working me at all. She's thinking about, I'll go down and get the chapstick, and all of a sudden I'm being given the opportunity, and I've been studying this text all week, to choose her best.

At cost to me, and I decide not to. So how does this resolve? When the kids come in to say goodnight, I say, hey, go get mom's chapstick. I had to teach them the cost of loving their parents.

Okay, now, before Katharine says anything, she said, okay, if you tell that story, make it clear that I didn't expect you to get my chapstick. She didn't. That's actually very true, and I actually apologized to her later.

She's like, you're retired. I didn't care. But it comes down to moments like that, doesn't it? Where if we're willing and brave enough, we go, oof.

At the heart of my sinful nature is my choose the best for myself nature. Let's explore these two parts. Let's explore these two parts in light of Deacon Brett being called to the ministry of loving the other, which is at the heart of every Christian calling and at the heart of the priestly calling, to love others as Jesus has loved them.

Choose the best for another. Always in Scripture when you're studying, it's so important to be reading ahead of what was given, whether it's Paul's sort of logical, well, somewhat logical sequence thinking, or a narrative in the Old Testament Jewish Scriptures where you're reading it, you understand what's happened before and after. When you read John who wrote this book, it's extremely important to work with context because John is weaving.

If you'll work with context, what happens before and after something Jesus says, you will always find that John knew where he was going, and you know where he's come from. It's very important in the words Jesus gives us in the New Commandment for the way in which John chronicles what happened the night before Jesus dies, the night that we know in our customs as Maundy Thursday, when he gives them the Lord's Supper. And what happened before this event in the same night is that Jesus washes the feet of the disciple, a culturally confusing, absolutely one's counter to how foot washing would have happened in that time in the ancient Near East, whereby the student washes the rabbi's feet, the teacher's feet.

To even conceive of the idea, I'll wash my disciple's feet, took a thinker, took someone that doesn't really live fully in this world, to even come up with the idea, take somebody who's in touch with something greater than himself, richer than himself, who is consistently living by the idea, how do I choose the best for another? Just the action itself. Before Jesus performs the action, he teaches us something critical about how we can learn to love. And we can learn to love.

You can always, no matter what your circumstances are, choose to love another. That choice is never taken from you as a Christian. So Jesus says, before he washes their feet, during supper, excuse me, verse 3, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper, laid aside his outer garments, and washed the feet of the disciples.

The ability to choose the best for another can only come as a gift from God. You will not consistently generate this yourself. You will not be able to overcome your choose-the-best-for-yourself nature.

Even Jesus, who was without sin, but fully human, to conduct the foot washing of his followers, needed to know that he had received a gift from the Father, verse 3, that he had come from the Father and he was going back to the Father. It was this and this that gave Jesus the ability, the power, to even think of foot washing, and then conduct it, to choose the best for another. God gives the gift of himself that we can give the gift of ourselves to others.

You'll be stymied and frustrated and eventually emotionally and spiritually burnt out if you hear this message and don't understand that God gives the gift of himself in Jesus in the Spirit at the cross so that we can give the gift of ourselves to others. Even our Lord depended on the gift of love from the Father to love his followers. Brett displayed a beautiful situation where he chose the best for another and was able to do so through a gift from God.

I heard this story several months ago. Brett describes it as a day and it was a couple of radio programs that sort of piqued his thinking because they were talking about the reality of miscarriage for couples. He was reminded of the loss that he and Julie suffered when they lost their first in a miscarriage.

His heart was tuned to what people may be going through with miscarriage. He talked to a co-worker and they were dealing with the reality of miscarriage. He began to realize God's giving me something.

There's a message being given to me through these circumstances. I need to start praying for somebody probably at res who may be pregnant that I don't know of and maybe is vulnerable to miscarriage. He kind of thought through the people that he knew wanted to be pregnant.

And his heart alighted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit upon Sarah Rowning, a long-term member here, a long-term leader. She and her husband had been through the process of adopting and told an amazing story of adopting their children and they were also in the process of having a biological child. Brett had no idea what was going on in their lives in this particular instance so he just started to pray for Sarah Rowning.

He then emailed her, I'm praying for you. He was pastoral. He was careful.

He definitely didn't set any expectations. He just said, I'm praying for you. Several days later he saw her here at church, he said, I've been praying for you.

He said, I've got to talk to you. She said, I'm pregnant. And Brett said, I've been praying for you that you'd be pregnant and not miscarrying.

Sarah said, Brett, we've miscarried eight times. This is exactly what I'm terrified about. This is exactly what I need prayer for.

Brett, through a gift of the Holy Spirit, locks into prayer. He said, don't use this story to say that I'm a great prayer. I had a compulsion.

I was, it's like a massive, you know, 60 mile per hour wind pushing me. I had to pray for Sarah. I had to pray for this baby.

I had to pray through the time when the baby might be vulnerable and for a few months he prayed fervently as a gift from God, choosing the best for someone outside of himself for another. Shiloh was born, full term, an absolute miracle. We know the details of the Roni story.

She celebrated her first birthday just a few weeks ago. That's what it looks like for us to choose the best for another. For those of us that follow the Cubs and watch the Cubs, I couldn't be happier that Father Rudy's here this morning for this illustration.

Father Rudy is one of our priests and the longest suffering Cubs fan in America. It was a remarkable night Thursday night. I listened on old school transistor radio and got to listen to Jake Arrieta, the Cubs ace, throw a no hitter.

These happen four to six times in the entire season. He's thrown two of them in the last several games. You count last season as well.

And whether you like baseball or not, when the pitcher is on the verge of throwing a no hitter, everything's engaged. Yes, it's his pitching, but it's his catchers calling the pitches. It's the defense.

It's everything happening at one time. And at any moment, just in one moment, the no hitter can be gone like that. I mean, we were glued to the radio, listening to every single pitch.

Our hearts were pounding as he accomplished this amazing athletic feat. That is something I never do. And I listen to sports radio the next day.

Be careful. Sports radio may not be good for your health. I listen to sports radio, and on it they had the catcher, David Ross, who caught the game.

Fifteen-year veteran, never caught a no hitter. Everyone knows, as any catcher would, he's always wanted to catch a no hitter. And he shared how Jake Gary had his first text to his wife after he threw the no-no, was, I did it for Rossi, the catcher.

And I got choked up listening to that on the radio. It was really moving. I thought, wow.

He chose the best for another. He put someone else's name there. And then I started getting choked up, and I thought, but it didn't cost him that much.

I mean, really, it's like, that's great, but he'll still be Jake Gary Etta, the once-in-a-lifetime, very likely Hall of Fame pitcher. And David Ross will be an asterisk, and David Ross caught his first no hitter that day. So yay, yay for Jake Gary Etta.

It was actually for, you know, the way some athletes handle their lives, virtuous. But is that all there is to love? I did it for Rossi? Or is there more? Well, of course there's more. Actually, love fully engages.

We choose the best for another, and it's costly. And we lose something as someone else gains, at least seemingly so. And that, of course, is what our Lord is preparing to do the night before His crucifixion.

He washes their feet, and it's beautiful. But it's only the first movement of this two-movement symphony of love. And it's in the second move of Jesus, when He goes to the cross, that He costly chooses.

Look at our text. When He had gone out, that's referring to Judas, who Jesus has given His life to, as one of His closest comrades and friends. When Judas had gone out, when Judas had betrayed Jesus, Jesus says, now, now.

Now is the time of my glory. Now is not the time to feel like everything is coming apart. Now is not the time to doubt whether God is in full control of all events, histories, time, and people.

Now is not the time to be afraid. Now is the time of my glory. And what appears to be the darkest, scariest, most disconcerting, disorienting moment is the time when I will shine.

This is why Augustine said about the cross, others see Him hanging when Christians see Him reigning. Amen? That's the heart of the cross. This is why we have a cross in the center of the church.

This is why many of us wear a cross or carry a cross. This is why we value the crucifix, not because it's some ancient Catholic symbol, because it says this is love. This is the love that cost our Lord everything.

And He loved us to the end. And that's what He's saying when He says, love one another as I have loved you. Love with a cost.

Love with an abandon. Love as a father loves his children. Love as a mother loves her children.

Love as a spiritual parent. What better metaphor can the Bible give us to help us understand the concrete nature of this love than to relate it to us as what it is to be a parent and be very clear that the teaching of the Scriptures is that every man, whether they have biological children or not, is a spiritual father. Every woman, whether they have biological children or not, is a spiritual mother because they're called to give up their lives for another.

The one who uses the metaphor of spiritual parenting more than anyone was a celibate. Paul had no children. Paul was not married.

But he knew his identity in Christ was to be a father and to give up his life for his spiritual children. To give up his life for the sake of the lost. That's your identity.

That's why Jesus says, little children. He says it again in John 20. You remember when we studied it two weeks ago? He calls to them when they're fishing, children.

That's why John imitates Jesus and when he writes his letter in 1 John, several times he says children, little children, sons and daughters. He understands that the identity of the Christian is to be a spiritual father, to be a spiritual mother who chooses the best for another, even at the greatest of costs. Now, this cost can be complex.

And it takes discernment to understand the nature of the cost when you're spiritually seeking to give your life through the power of Jesus for another. Indeed, look even at the dynamic with Judas and Peter, two of Jesus' inner core, 12 disciples. Judas betrays Jesus and goes out into the night.

And Jesus lets him go. Don't make Jesus a robot. He had choices at that point.

He could have gone after Judas. He could have begged him not to betray him. He could have gone ahead of Judas.

Jesus knew this was happening. We know this in the Scriptures. He could have gone ahead.

He could have talked to him and tried to forestall it. But instead, Jesus chooses the cost as the spiritual parent of Judas and lets him go. He gives him up to Judas' own choices.

Depicted theologically in Romans chapter 1, we're taught that God sometimes gives us up to our own choices. Now that's complex. That's pretty complex parenting.

Because sometimes when we're seeking to love another at great cost, it means that we allow them to experience the cost of their decisions. And that's actually how we give up our lives, although it may not look that way. Oh, there's Peter whom Jesus allows to go forward with his betrayal.

He does betray Jesus. He denies him three times. But Jesus comes back to Peter and calls him back into the way of love.

Indeed, he asks the question, Peter, do you love me? Let me teach you the way of choosing the best for another even when it's costly. So often we're making that discernment as parents, as workers in the marketplace. How do I love at a cost here? What gift am I being given by the Holy Spirit, by the Scriptures to actually love this person? We often need to wait on the gift.

We need to wait on the word of the Father to give us the strength we need to love another. So Brett, Julie, we are here as witness to your already established lifestyles of loving others at a cost. I've seen in your lives and had opportunity to see in the lives that not everyone sees the way that you choose with your children, the people of resurrection, with your lives to love even at a cost.

But now you have even greater opportunity as you come into a spiritual and sacramental fatherhood to help be a picture to all of us of our callings to love one another as Jesus has loved us. So the time will come and you will choose to love and be utterly misunderstood. The time will come and you will choose to love and you will most likely subtly in our culture be rejected for that choice to love.

The time will come and you will be called to love and you will choose not to love and have opportunity to repent and confess and humble yourself especially before your people. Love one another as Jesus has loved us. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen.

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