

Hate Sin

Romans 12:09g

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Most of us have come to the point sooner or later in our lives where we decided the only reasonable explanation of life is that some Supreme Being somewhere has made the world and made us. Most of us eventually reach the conclusion, therefore, that the only thing worth doing in our lives is whatever he would want us to do. I think all of us calculate that we can spend our life in all kinds of ways. There are millions of things we can do. We can fulfill ourselves by making money, trying to be happy, exploiting our talents, buying or selling cars, or having children. Most of us eventually come to the place where we see, "There are a thousand ways I could waste my years. There are a thousand things I could fill my time here on earth with, but really the only thing worth doing is whatever this God who made me wants me to do."

It is that very directive of his that you and I have been talking about over the past weeks. It is a very plain one. Our Creator said to us, "One thing, really, above everything else--let your love be genuine." I'm sure we have all been in jobs we thought were a lifetime calling. I'm sure we have all been in houses we thought we would live in forever. It is strange how everything changes. Everything moves and you leave what you thought would be the meaning of your life. Loved ones, there is only one thing for which you are here for, and that is to love each other with a genuine love. That is the only thing that actually stands and will stand. It is hard for us in our twenties because we are eager to remold the world in our image. In our thirties there is a little bit of fulfillment of that, and in our forties we settle in. Our fifties come and we gradually begin to see that it probably is true--the only thing that really lasts, the only thing really worth doing and the only thing that is continually real, in recession and out of recession, in success and out of success, is our attitude to each other.

As you look back at men or women you have worked with in the past and you see the battles you went through, how you fought one another and struggled with one another in business, and now they are either dead or beyond your touch, you think, "This wasn't worth it. We should have spent those years loving each other. What have we gained now? Most of those things we struggled for are either bankrupt or the business is temporarily suspended." We think of all the things we put effort into, and it really seems pretty obvious to many of us that we have just a few years on this earth and it goes very fast, but we have other men and women like ourselves, and we can love them with a genuine love. That is about it, isn't it? Whether you die like Howard Hughes with the millions over which they fight for the next decade, or you die like a pauper, it doesn't matter much. What matters is what we have been to each other. Actually what matters this very minute is what you will be like to each other after the benediction. We haven't got much more than that. All the rest is pretty dispensable and doesn't stay in our memories very long anyway.

Yet we have been saying that a lot of us have very strange ideas of love and that love is not all we think it is. It is not the parent who says to the child, "I love you" and really means "I want to fulfill my frustrated ambitions in you, and therefore, I am concentrating on you to make sure you do what I wasn't able to do." That isn't love. That is wanting emotional satisfaction from your child. Nor is it the guy who says to the girl with whom he has committed fornication, "I love you." That is really, "I lust after you" or "I need you" or "I want you." Love is not that kind of thing. Love is giving--it is giving yourself, it is giving your whole self, it is giving your whole self all the

time without reservation. Love is being real with each other, letting us see each other, letting us know each other. It is opening your heart to each other, being what you are really like, not putting up pretences and barriers and bluff and hypocrisy, but being what you are, whether that looks good or doesn't look good, whether it looks slick or doesn't look slick.

Love is giving yourself as you are to the rest of us. It is opening your heart; it is exposing yourself and sharing what you are like--your deepest thoughts and feelings. It is taking your talents and abilities, your skills and insights and laying them at our disposal. Love is taking those things that everybody is using for their own benefit and laying them at other's disposal. It is using your intellect and insight, your physical appearance and mental ability to bring about the very best for us that you know. Not to bring about the very best for yourself that you know--that is what the world is trying to do, and it is destroying itself. Real love is using the abilities that you normally have been taught to use for your own benefit but using them for our benefit to bring about the very best thing that you know.

Matthew 7:12 says, "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them." It means putting all of us in the place of yourself and working so that we will experience the very best that you know. Of course the very best that we all know is to get each other to know the Maker whom we are going to face after the last breath has been breathed here on earth. That is the very best thing we can do for each other here. We can help each other to want to know our Maker, to want to love him, to want to trust him. So real love is giving yourself to the rest of us with a view to getting us to trust the Maker and know him and love him. It is really to lay ourselves out to each other. That is what love is. It is vicarious. It is putting others before yourself. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." You lay down all your abilities for the sake of the rest of us.

It is not natural, surely. It sounds good and we are all for it because we all hope to be the beneficiaries, but it isn't natural. You know why it isn't natural, for one reason only. We say, "I have 'me' to look after. How am I going to waste my time looking after all of you? I have myself to look after." We think, "Lay my abilities, skills, insights, aptitudes, physical appearance, and mental ability at everybody else's disposal? But for goodness sake, that stuff was given to me to look after myself, to take care of myself." Isn't that the difficulty most of us have? We feel, "It would be nice to live the way you have just described. I'd love to. In fact some of my happiest days have been those self-forgetful moments when I have been involved in some project that was bigger than myself and unconnected with myself. I have really enjoyed myself. It has been like living without the consciousness of living. It was fun and the time flew past. I would like to live like that, but I can't afford to live like that. I have to use this mind and these hands to take care of myself, to provide for myself, make clothes for myself, get food for myself, to shelter myself, to make myself happy, to help myself to be fulfilled, and after that I will try to love the rest of you. Sure will try! If I have any of it left over you are the first ones that will get it." Isn't that where we get the idea to love yourself first and then love others if we can afford it?

Actually, in a way it is fair, isn't it? Can you think of any human being who has lived the way we explained? Of course there is only one. You can see how he could live that way, because his Father owned the whole universe. So he didn't have to worry. He knew his Father was going to take care of him. He knew he was going to provide for him. He knew his Father was going to provide the clothes and the food he needed. He could afford to put all of us in the place of himself, because he knew his Father would take care of him. He didn't need to use his abilities and intellect, his mind and skills to take care of himself.

So in a way he could treat all of us as if we were himself. We think, "I know you are going to say that he is our Father, too," and we believe it intellectually. We believe Jesus' words in Matthew 6:26-30: "Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?" We say, "Intellectually I know we are in the same position as Jesus, but I find it difficult experientially to live that way. I find myself living as if God is not my father and as if my job is to use this IQ that I have and the ability that I have to provide for myself. I know I should relax and rest in God. I should concentrate on providing for all of you, but I find it difficult to do that on a day-to-day basis. I find that the only way to do that is if Jesus himself would make his whole attitude of life become mine. It would also take his trust in his father to become mine, and I don't see how I could live that way unless he could come inside me and live like that. I could stand back and let him live like that."

Loved ones, that is God's plan. I don't think you or I will be anything but timid, worried, anxious little squirrels trying to hoard in the nuts for the next winter--and then in case the next winter is bad, for the winter after that. We won't be anything different from that unless this noble, dignified prince of God that strode through the world and walked through death with delight in his heart is able somehow to become us. That is possible. Jesus is no longer locked in his physical body. He is alive at this moment at the right hand of our Creator and he is able to send his Spirit into us. He is able to put his attitude into your heart. He is able to beget in you his own attitude of trust. Only when his Spirit comes into you will you find that love is shed abroad in your heart, that self-forgetful love, that all-giving love we have described here.

But it can't be while you are still worried about "me". You can't be concerned about all the rest of us if you are still worried about yourself. Only as Jesus' Spirit is able to come into you and you hand your whole life into the Father's hands, so that you really have the rest and relaxation that Jesus had about your insurance policy and about your happiness. Only then will the love of God for the rest of us be shed abroad in your heart, that love that puts all of us in the place of yourself. All you have to do is ask Jesus to send his Spirit into your heart. It does mean asking with all your heart. God has so arranged life that his Son's Spirit cannot come in and take over your heart and beget in you all his attitudes unless you ask him with all your heart. Unless you decide that once and for all, you will give up this preoccupation with taking care of yourself and you will put yourself into God's hands and let him take care of you as he pleases. It is not giving yourself to him and tomorrow saying, "OK, Lord, you are not taking care of me the way I think you should." But putting yourself into his hands once and for all and separating yourself from this business of concentrating all your energies and abilities on providing for yourself. That is it, loved ones. The fact is all of us have abilities. Especially the person who thinks they have no abilities. You have abilities none of the rest of us have in exactly the combination that you have. But they weren't given to waste on yourself. God will take care of you. He put you here; you are his responsibility. He will take care of you; He will provide for you if you use the abilities that He has given you to take care of the rest of us, to love us, to bring us into an awareness of him and into a knowledge of him as our dear Father. But it does require that you have done with this business of looking after yourself. That is what sin is. It is not the other things that we talk about. Sin is looking after yourself as if you are the only one to do it and using every ability and

resource you have for that purpose.

Jesus' Spirit will come into your life this morning if you will put yourself as far as you can from that self-concern business that leaps up inside your heart. In other words, the moment you sense self-concern coming up inside, and you know what it is. It occurs when somebody criticizes and you think, "What are people beginning to think of me," or it comes when you have a financial worry and you think, "What am I going to do?" The moment the first glimpse of self-concern occurs to you, God requires you to set yourself apart from it, to push it away from you as if it were the plague, as if it were yellow fever, as if it were a leprosy that will destroy you, because that is what it is. Sin is that little rising of self-concern and preoccupation with your position or your situation or your status. That is what sin is. The moment that rises inside you, that moment the Spirit of Jesus and his trust in His Father and his relaxation and his love for the rest of us is driven out of your heart. So it does require that you put that other stuff far from you.

Actually that is why this verse goes on as it does. Romans 12:9: "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good." The only way to have that faith of Jesus dwelling in you and the consequent love for the rest of us, which is a miraculous gift of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is to have a continual attitude of hatred to the evil that rises inside you -- the sin. The word for hatred in Greek is "apostugountes" and it means "to detest utterly." We must hate and abhor with all our heart that rising of self-concern that so often governs our hearts and our lives and steals from us our peace. It means "having done with it."

It is almost like learning to swim. You know that finally you have to regard that support system that you have, be it the side of the pool, or your dad holding your chin or your mom with her hand under your tummy, sooner or later you have to regard those things as evil. You must regard those as things that you don't want anything to do with if you are going to swim. You are only going to swim when you regard them like that. It is the same with riding a bicycle. If you keep hanging on to the guy's shoulder you will never ride the bicycle. Sooner or later you have to regard the shoulder as something that is actually evil for you. It is the same with this self-concern that rises inside us, that moment of worry. I think you see we let it go too far. I think you say, "Now wait a minute! If you get a statement from somebody that is trying to collect a bill from you the most natural thing is a moment of concern rising in your heart." Then you follow that up with another thought, "What am I going to do?" No! The moment that self-concern rises, you are to abhor it and detest it and hate it and you are to remind yourself to say to Jesus, "Lord, I'm in you by act of your Father and you are in me. Lord Jesus, I ask you to bring to me that peace that comes from knowing that your Father is my Father and that he is taking care of me." Loved ones, it needs that immediate reaction.

Yet the opposite is also true. The other word [hold fast] is "kollomenoi" and it means to cleave to what is good, embracing it. Actually the word means "gluing yourself" to it. It is the same with swimming. When you let go of the side or have your mom's hand off your tummy or your dad's hand off your chin, you had better get close to that water and get to know it. You have to commit yourself to this new element that is going to hold you up. That is what it means--gluing yourself to Jesus. It means abhorring completely the rising of self-concern and the feeling that you have to take care of yourself, and it means grasping Jesus, embracing him, putting your arms around him and saying, "Lord, I'm holding on to you like grim death!" It is the same with the bicycle. You finally let go of the guy's shoulder and then you just concentrate on that bike and that is it; that is your only hope.

It is kind of exciting, actually. Faith is exciting because you are up there holding your breath. It is a wholehearted commitment. I think some of us say, "Well, I trusted the Lord that way and he let

me down." Well, in fact we didn't trust the Lord that way. We had concern rising in our heart, we were worried and anxious and we were trying to get a bit of help from him to bail us out. That is not faith. Faith is abhorring completely that self-concern, abhorring that whole attitude of we are on our own and committing ourselves utterly to Jesus. If you say, "You mean it could be actually controlling your thoughts?" That is exactly it. It is controlling your thoughts and committing your will in accordance with your thoughts. That is what belief plus obedience is. It is controlling your thoughts. When self-concern rises and the worry about self rises abhor it and put it from you. You say to me, "I can't! I can't! I can't!" Sure you can. You know you can. You know there have been times at night when you have been worried and you know you have a job to do the next day and eventually you decide at three o'clock, "I'm stopping this. I'm going to cut this out of my mind. I don't care. I have to get some sleep for tomorrow." You know fine well when we are forced to it; we can will our thoughts to do what we want them to do.

So it is, loved ones, with faith. In order to love the rest of us and put the rest of us in place of yourself, you have to have somebody to look after yourself. That is just sense. That somebody is your dear Father who put you here. He will take care, if you will keep clear of the self-concern, keep clear of looking at things as if he doesn't exist and as if you are the only one to take care of yourself. Then you can throw yourself into taking care of the rest of us. That is what loving your neighbour as yourself is. It is laying all that you have at the disposal of all the rest of us, to bring us into a close and loving trust and knowledge and friendship of our Father Creator.

I do pray that somebody here might come into that freedom, because that is living, that is liberty. It is funny how you can look after everybody else and it is not such a crushing, worrying, depressing, deadening thing as trying to look after yourself. It should be some indication to us. Too many of us say, "That is because we don't care about them as much as we care about ourselves." But actually, no. It is a fact that if you are involved living your life for the rest of us, you will find it a lightening and a fulfilling thing because you were never meant to just look after yourself. Your God will do that while you take care of the rest of us. I pray that somebody will lift into it this morning and be free. Just say to him, "Lord Jesus, I haven't been living that way and I do want to. I ask you to come into my life now and to begin to beget in me the Spirit and the trust that you obviously have in your Father. Lord, that is what I need. Father, in response I will finish once and for all this business of taking care of myself. I'm going to live for others from this day onward." Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, when we think of you we think of someone with a smooth forehead, no wrinkles and no frowns. We think of someone who is bright with love, light and freedom. We always think of somebody who is absolutely confident and capable. Yet we always think of someone who never gave a thought of himself but was utterly preoccupied with us. Lord Jesus, we are sick, sore and tired of the worry and anxiety we have of trying to take care of ourselves and the miserable, selfish monsters that makes us. We are sick of paying lip service to loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Lord Jesus, we know that our Father is in charge. We know that he takes care of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air but Lord Jesus we have tried to believe that day by day and we cannot. So, we ask you, Lord, will you come into us and make your attitude ours so we will live like that. Lord, in response, we now declare self concern and any rising of preoccupation of ourselves as sin. We will hate it as evil, Lord. We will cling to you with all our hearts -- cling to you the only good. Lord Jesus we commit ourselves to that knowing that it is a battle of the mind first and then a commitment of the will. We trust you to shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit this love for each other.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us.
Amen.