

Loving Others

Romans 13:10b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Love -- the reason for the existence of the world is love. And the reason you're here and can see me, or can hear me, is that somebody loves you and wanted you to enjoy life and so, made you. That somebody either made you directly, or devised the evolutionary process that has produced you -- but you all are here because somebody has loved you. Somebody wanted you to enjoy living and that's why it's such a terrible thing ever to say, "I wish I had never been born," because there is some dear person that has put a lot of work into you. You're unique. There's nobody like you, and somebody loved you a lot to make you like this. So never say that -- actually you can't say that. You can't say that because you haven't produced yourself! Somebody else wanted you to enjoy life and they made you -- and that's because they loved you so much.

That's what love is: love is wanting the best for another person. That's what it is -- it's wanting the best for another person. And it's because we know all those things deep down in our hearts, that we actually have the intuitive feeling that what the world needs most is "love, sweet love." We do have that feeling. We have the feeling that if there were more love, it would stop the bombing, that it would stop the wars, that love would stop the divorces. That love would stop the little children dying of starvation in India.

Most of us have the feeling that love would solve the world's problems. It doesn't matter how different our ideological backgrounds are, almost every human being will agree with that -- that love -- we don't know why we say this, but we feel that love would solve the problems that we are facing today, both personally and nationally. And yet we have not only eliminated love from our national lives as well as our personal lives, but the thing that you and I have to face is, that we have almost completely lost the idea of what love is. For instance, many of us here would feel very happy and very content to say, "Well, I don't feel love for my colleagues at work." That is, we wouldn't feel we were necessarily right, but we would think that's a normal thing to say, "I don't feel love for my colleagues at work."

Some of us actually would find it very normal to say, "I don't feel love for my relatives. I don't feel love for my parents. I don't feel love for my wife. I don't feel love for the neighbors that I have. What has that got to do with it? That's irrelevant." But you see, such is our misconception of what love is, that you all stop at that and say, "Well, don't be dumb -- it's not irrelevant. If I don't feel the love, how can I express it?" But love is not a feeling, you see, love is not a feeling. That's how far off base you and I are when we think of love. We automatically think that, of course it's right to say, "I don't want anything more to do with this marriage because I don't feel love for you anymore." What has that got to do with it? What does it matter whether you feel love or not? Love is not a feeling -- so that's irrelevant. But you and I tend to say, "Oh no, no, love is a feeling." No, it's not. It's not a feeling.

A lawyer asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "Love your neighbor." The lawyer said, "Who is my neighbor and how do I love him?" Jesus explained how there was a certain man going on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. And he fell among thieves who battered him, and stole all he had, and left him lying on the road. And then Jesus describes how several people passed that man, until a Samaritan comes by. Then does Jesus describe the successive waves

of overwhelming emotion that rolled through the heart of the Samaritan as he gazes -- hour after hour -- upon the bleeding man, and feels love for him? Jesus is so good. I'll ask you to look at the verse because it's so different from that, and it's a good dose of this that we need to quiet all this silliness that we're talking about.

Luke 10:33, "But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion." That's the description of the waves and waves of emotion -- he had compassion -- "and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'"

Now Jesus seems to have missed it a bit. He doesn't realize that love is a feeling. Jesus should have spent those verses describing the tremendous waves of love that this man had. But Jesus knows better than anybody what love is and he says, "Love is binding up his wounds, pouring out oil and wine, setting him on his own beast, bringing him to an inn, taking care of him, next day taking out two denarii, giving them to the innkeeper and saying 'Take care of him and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'"

That's love -- love is wanting the best for another person. Love is not a feeling. It's not rolling emotions. It's not waves and waves of pity and sympathy and empathy. It is doing something for another person that benefits the other person. It is wanting the best for another person. It is a disposition of the will. It is an acting in your life. It is the disposition of will and actions, not a disposition of emotions.

Lust is a feeling. Other people liking you brings about a feeling inside of you. Other people approving of you brings about feelings. Those things bring about feelings; but love is a disposition of the will and the actions -- that's what love is. Love wants the best for another person. It's a down-to-earth, practical thing.

The idea that love is feelings and emotion is as irrelevant as saying that ordinary life is a matter of emotions. You don't come in to the boss at work and say, "Boss, I was lying in bed this morning, just getting in touch with my inner feelings and I felt that maybe that's what I should do today. I should just get in touch with my inner feelings and begin to become a more empathetic person that will understand your position better. But then I thought, well no, I won't. I'll just come to work." And the boss would say, "Oh I am so glad you decided to do that, because, really, your actions means so much more to me than your feelings."

You don't. You don't run your ordinary life all wrapped up in your feelings. Love is not a matter of emotions and feelings -- it's a matter of action and will. I'll show you what love is, loved ones, it's Romans 8:28. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." Now, what is his purpose? And in what way is he working for good? "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son." That's the greatest good God had. He thought, "The greatest thing I can do for all of you is to draw you into a place where you willingly become like my son."

God works all things in our lives to bring about that good -- that's what love is. Love is having a good that you think is worth more than anything else in another person's life, and working by your actions and your will, to bring that about in their life. That's what love is -- but do you see

that many of us have retreated from that?

In this “me” generation that we live in, many of us have retreated from that practical life of action and will, when we think about love, and we have retreated into our own subjective experience. And many of us are utterly convinced that love is something we feel for other people. So we've retreated into our experience where we concentrate on trying to work up feelings of love for other people. And we go round and round into the private dialogues in our own hearts saying, "Do I love this person? Do I love that person? Do I feel love for this person? Do I feel love for my mother?"

Your dear mom probably is not as preoccupied with your inner feelings as she is with you remembering her birthday and sending a card or a present to her. Or that you are kind to her, or you wallpaper the bedroom or paint the door -- that comes home to her as actual, practical care and concern and interest in her. She has no idea what's going on inside your complex mind, or your complex heart, or your complex emotions. She cares about you, but she can't tell all that. She can tell what you do for her, or what you don't do for her.

Now, loved ones, many of us are mesmerized by some kind of strange deception that has become a disease in our society. We've become convinced that those things are philanthropy or social responsibility, but that love is something that I feel “in here”. And I have to get that feeling and I have to examine if I have that feeling towards other people or not. So, far from us looking at love as something whose benefits our neighbor can actually experience in a practical way, we look upon love as feelings that will reassure us that we actually love people. That's not what love is. It doesn't matter too much whether you feel love or not.

Love is action. It's wanting the best for another person and it's working to bring that about in their lives. In other words, maybe the most basic factor in loving others -- is loving others. Maybe the most basic factor in loving others is loving others instead of loving yourself -- instead of concentrating on your own emotions and your own subjective feelings and trying to find out if you love a person or not. The most basic factor in loving others is loving others -- not being preoccupied with yourself and not being preoccupied with whether you feel love or not.

It's time to act. To the last generation, this is so basic. But to our generation, I think it comes almost as a new Gospel. We've gotten so wrapped up with this business of “getting in touch with our feelings” and “do we feel love or do we not feel love.” Many of us are in the same situation as poor Judd in that old movie “Oklahoma”. The song goes something like this: “poor Judd is dead, a candle lights his head.” Then it goes on and says how he loved everybody: he loved the little birds, he loved the little children, he loved the little dogs, he loved the little animals – now this is the punch line -- he never let on. That is, he never let anybody know that he loved them. And I think a lot of us are in that spot.

We have all kinds of the most delicious feelings inside, the most delicate emotions and affection of love towards all kinds of people but we never let them know it because we don't express it in ordinary, willed, actions that benefit their lives. Loved ones, that's all that love is. Love is nothing if it is not something that wants the best for another person's life. And that actually has an effect in somebody else's life.

How many of us have been continually frustrated by our moms? We go home and she says “Have you enough turkey, have you enough, have you enough, have you enough, have you enough”, and you want to say, “Oh mom, just let's sit down and let's just be together.” Yet, dear love her, maybe we could

do with a lot more of that in our lives.

Maybe we're too willing to say, "Let me stare at you and love you!" Meanwhile the other poor soul would far rather you did something that would actually benefit their lives, or would show care for them, or show a practical interest in what they're feeling. That's it, loved ones.

Now, there is another great misconception. Along with this misconception that love is a feeling, there's a misconception, in our generation, that love is letting people do whatever they want. I think it's come from our old fear -- a ridiculous fear. We're all afraid of a puritanical life and we are the most un-puritanical lot that has ever been seen on the world's surface! But we love to say, "Wanting the best for other people has too often brought about inhibitions and complexes in them. So real love is just letting them do whatever they want."

Now, it is true that too often people have wanted the best for another person's life without a real concern for the people themselves. And too often, that has brought a kind of moralistic dictatorship of other people's lives. But, loved ones, love itself is not just letting people do what they want, it isn't.

I'd ask you to think back to that verse that is translated a little differently in the King James Version. It is Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to them that love God." Now God loves us. But he doesn't let us do whatever we want, because he has a good in mind for us that he is trying to draw us towards; namely to become like his son Jesus. But he wants us to do that willingly; because that's the only way you can become a free will agent like Jesus, if you really want to, yourself.

So he is trying, all the time, to draw us around to that. But if Richard Burton's dad did not succeed in moderating Richard Burton's drinking, then psoriasis of the liver would. "All things work together for good to them that love him." God's love has direction. God has built into the world of providence, and the world of nature, certain laws that are constantly, gently drawing us towards what he wants us to be.

If you don't teach your children not to be sarcastic and critical of others, then social alienation will. God has built into our natural world, and our social world, certain laws -- certain responses and reflexes that are, all the time, trying to draw us gently, gently towards the kind of person his son is.

In other words, God's love is not without moral content. God's love is wanting the best for another person and working to bring that about. It is not letting people do whatever they want and letting the chips fall where they may. This world is not a "laissez-faire" world where you can do whatever you want. It is a world that has all kinds of built-in responses and reflexes to draw you gradually in the right direction. If you don't learn to be pure in your sex life, STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) will teach you.

It's all through the world. Nowhere do you look in this world that God loves, and see a world that has no direction in its love, no moral content. Wherever you look in our world, you see he loves us. He has shown us immense mercy and forbearance; but all the time he is working to bring us towards what he believes is the best for us.

If your parents can't get you to stop using nicotine, lung cancer will. In other words, the extremes

of those things, not talking about nicotine or alcohol but the extremes of those things, God has provided built-in responses to in order to correct this.

In other words, what we have here is not a "laissez-faire" world where you do what you like and let the chips fall where they may. What you've got is a world where God says, "I have given you 70 years here, and I love you. And I am going to be patient with you for these 70 years; but all the time I am going to be trying to bring you into what I know will make you happy because I made you -- and I know what will make you happy."

So, loved ones, it's the same with our love. Love is not just letting people do what they want -- love has moral content in it. Now, if you say "That's a broad statement -- what is the moral content?" Oh, this dear book (the Bible). If you love a person you won't commit adultery with them. If you love a person, you won't commit fornication. God has tied it all down in this dear book, not just to give us laws that would make life hard for us, but he has said to us, "Look, if you really love, you won't take another person's property from them, and you won't steal from them. If you really love another person, you won't want what they have, you'll be delighted with what I have given you and you'll want them to have what they have. You won't covet."

"If you really love a person when something bad happens to them, you won't say, 'Oh lucky me, it didn't happen to me', you'll be sorry for them. Your heart will go out to them. If you really love a person, you won't want to remove them out of your way for your own convenience -- you won't kill them. You won't want them out of the way."

In other words, this dear book has all kinds of laws in it -- and elaborations of those laws that show us what loving others is. And if you want to know if you are loving a person, well, are you doing to them what God has recommended in this book? If you aren't, then you don't love them.

So love is a very practical thing. Love is a down to earth thing. It's thinking about other people, and helping other people, and trying to bring about the best in another person's life. Brothers and sisters, I think a lot of us have hidden behind a mixture of egotism and what we call liberalism. The egotism is a self-preoccupation with our own feelings, and the liberalism is this kind of idea, "Oh let them do what they want." And we let them do what they want because we don't want to be thought of as puritanical, or we don't want to be thought of as opinionated and it's not for their good at all. It's for our good -- it's to protect us, that we refuse to give direction, or to try to bring about direction in a person's life.

Loved ones, you're not loving the little guy if he says, "Mom, I want to run across the highway" and you say "Well, if I love you, I'll let you do what you want." You don't! If a little three-year-old picks up a razor blade, you don't say, "Well, I love them, so I'll let them do what they want." You don't! Love, there, has a very definite, moral content.

So love is not a feeling, and love is not letting people do whatever they want. Then what is love? Well, it's a commandment. It's a commandment. And if you say, "No. Love is an intuitive, spontaneous feeling that I have that bounds up from me and you suppress it every time you say commandment." Not according to this dear book (the Bible). This Creator of ours, who knows more about love than any of us here, he puts it in those terms.

You'll see it, loved ones, if you look at John 15:12. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." See, Jesus says, "This is the commandment that I give to you. It's

second only to the first commandment, which is to love my Father -- your Creator who has made you. This is the second commandment, love one another." And if you say, "Well, how do I do that?" He says, "The same way as I have loved you -- love one another as I have loved you."

Now Jesus is the one who made you, do you know that? "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." John 1:3 Indeed, there's an amazing verse in the Bible that says, "Before you existed, you were life in Jesus." Before you ever existed, before you ever came into your mom's womb, you were life in Jesus. So this is the Person, who had you in his own heart before you ever were known by your mom, who says to you, "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you."

Now how did he love us? Oh well, it's the next verse. John 15:13, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." That's the kind of love.

You're to love the rest of us the way Jesus loved you, and loved us. That is, he laid down his life for us; in other words, that broken, self-sacrificing figure on the Cross in 29 A.D. that we see -- that's reality. That's the heart of reality -- that's final truth. That is what will stand after everything has gone. That will stand, that will remain. That broken, self-sacrificing figure that gave up all that he had for all of us, that is final reality. And you and I, whenever we at last see final reality, that's what we'll see. However long it takes you to die, or me to die, when we eventually come to that moment, what we'll see is that. That's the heart of reality, love like that.

In other words, Jesus says to you and me this day, "If you will believe what I've said, that my Father is your maker and that he already has plans to take care of you throughout your life, if you will believe that, and then give your life with its abilities, its time, its interest, its everything, to loving everybody else and to wanting the best for them and wanting to bring it about in their lives -- if you do that, then you, yourself will find my Father taking care of all your needs. Then, when you come into our presence at the end of life, you'll fit right into our heaven. But if you don't -- if you don't believe what I say and you regard your own life as your own responsibility to take care of in your own fashion, and you look after yourself first, and put yourself first in this world and begin to put everybody else second, your heart will grow hard and small and withered and at the end", and here is what he says, "the branches in me that do not bear fruit will be gathered and tossed into the fire."

So, loved ones, love is not an option. Love is the heart of reality and you either practice it now, or we will live in our own burning lusts forever in eternity. So we need to see it as, not some poetic emotional thing that we feel inside, but we need to see love as the willed direction of our actions and behavior to bring about the best in other people's lives at the expense of our own. So it's a down to earth thing.

So now I ask you, would you think of your own life, just for a moment? Are you bringing about the best in other people's lives? When you're with a person this afternoon, are you really interested in them, and do you really want the best for them, or are they just an addendum to your existence? Think about it.

As God brought home to my own heart, all of us, with all our great plans, and all our great preoccupation with our great lives, and all the things we're doing and all the things we're "doing

for the Lord” or all of the things we're “doing for our company” or all the other things, what does it matter unless every person you meet and spend time with, you actually are wanting the best for them? And you're giving them your attention, and you're respecting them, and you're thinking the best of them, and you're trying to make them happy. If you're not doing that, is your whole life not going to slide past, with you thinking of your big plans and all your important responsibilities and all these wonderful feelings you have inside you?

Are you not amazed, as I am, how one day slides to the next? Are you not? How one day slides into the next, Sunday again, Monday again, and it goes, doesn't it, and you don't realize it's going, and then an odd birthday makes you think it has gone -- but still, it's subtle, isn't it? It's seductive the way the life keeps sliding past. Don't waste it on these big feelings inside. Don't waste it on these wonderful aspirations that may never come about. Love with all your heart the person you're sitting beside today. Love with all your heart the person you're going to have lunch with today, that's what love is.

It's being kind to the person that you're with at this moment. It's wanting the best for them. It's trying to do something to make their life better than yours, that's what love is. Do it now. Today is the day of salvation. Begin now. Stop all the big feelings, all the aspirations, all the wonderful plans. Be now what you are. Who knows? Who knows how many of us will see tomorrow?

In a way the guy was right in the song “Tomorrow never comes”, it never does. Tomorrow never comes. All we've got is this moment, really. All we've got is this moment. Begin to love now so that some of the rest of us know you love us. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for being so practical and down to earth, so ordinary, and straight, and direct. Lord we thank you for cutting through all our hypocrisy, all our pretences and all our high and mighty saying to people “go and be warmed and be fed and be clothed.” Lord Jesus, enable us, now, to be practical and realistic, and to do things for other people, and to begin to be able to count, at the end of a day what we have actually done for others.

Lord, for too long we've covered over that by saying we don't count up all the good things we do. But so often it's because we've done no good things. Lord Jesus, we commit ourselves to love, and to wanting the best and working to bring about the best in our neighbors' lives. To forgetting ourselves and beginning to enter into life abundant because we know that when we do that, you'll shed abroad in our heart your love that is patient and kind, that is not jealous or boastful. Lord, we thank you for that.

We ask you, now, to enable us to be what you are willing to fill us to be -- like yourself.

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