

True, Real Love

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We're discussing our wills and we're discussing the difference that Jesus' Spirit makes to the way your soul operates. The first part of the soul that we're dealing with during these weeks is our affections -- that part of our emotional life which is involved with our affections. One of the reasons that we talk about it first is that it's probably the most difficult part of your emotions to consecrate to God, yet if you haven't consecrated your affections, you haven't really consecrated anything at all, because your affections express so much of where your heart is. Last Sunday particularly, we tried to deal with the great deception that we are under in our society and that deception is that the only place you find true love is in marriage. So [the argument goes] if you want to experience true love you have to get married, and with that goes the idea that anyone who isn't married cannot possibly experience true love, then with that of course goes the idea that the person you're married to is someone you love more than anybody else in the whole world.

And of course that's what has led to all the perversion that has come into Christian family life because, maybe you realize, there is a great perversion in Christian family life. There is a great perversion that runs through all of Christendom that suggests that if you emphasize a family, you're emphasizing God and if you emphasize marital love, you're emphasizing the love of Jesus, so the two are intertwined and made synonymous. That's how you miss the great, generous, magnanimous love that is meant to be in the body of Jesus; because instead of having that great, magnanimous, generous love you have little family cells who exist on their own in the midst of a great deal of purely human love. And then these family cells come together in the so called "bodies of Christ", but they never really intermingle with each other, never at the level that they think they intermingle with themselves.

So you get that dreadful division between those who aren't married and those who are and of course it intensifies as they grow on in years, because they feel more and more like they're the spinsters or they're the bachelors. And you get more and more distinction between them and these "lucky families" that seem to have such warm little glowing cells -- and especially, of course, they glow at Christmas time. So Christmas time is a great time in our churches because it's "family time." The tragedy is that it's not Christian family time; it's really pagan family time under the name of Jesus.

That's why often we have such trouble with the promise, "bring up a child in that way that he should go, and when he grows old he will not depart from it." Often because the dear children are not brought up in the great, open, magnanimous family of God where everybody loves each other equally, but they're brought up in a pseudo-Christian, but really a pagan, family where the religion is actually the same as that in a great deal of Japan. It's actually the worship of our relatives; it's the worship of our ancestor's.

And loved ones, that all comes from this misconception that love is the cause of marriage. It isn't. The cause of a marriage is that God intends this man and this woman to live together as one person to express his image to the world; to do the work that he has for them to do, and to fulfill his purpose of bringing the nation's to himself. That's the cause of marriage. And if you say to me, "Oh, but isn't it true that two people who really fall in love are head over heels?" Yes, God gives them a great sense that they're involved in something that is bigger than both of them, and

they'll actually use those words. The tragedy is that they fail to see that it really is bigger than both of them; that they have been picked by the Father-Creator to live their lives together on this earth to express him to the world and to grow into his likeness, and together to set forth an image of him that is unique.

Instead of that, they begin to think, "This thing that is bigger than both of us is the fun we get out of each other. It's the sense of recognition that I get out of the other person, it's the sense of attention that I get out of him or her, and it's even the sense of physical and emotional gratification that I receive from them." They turn their eyes from the great God who joined them together and they turn their eyes on each other and as a result, the beautiful marriage that was meant by God to be a blessing to his world and to his body becomes a self-centered, self-worshipping, self-engrossed little cell that actually ends up stealing from Jesus' body. I don't know if you've seen that, but have you ever watched the girls and the guys that are all going for Jesus like mad until they get their guy or they get their girl? Once they nail them, "Okay, let's forget all of that stuff, let's get down to the important stuff of having children, building a home, and getting on with our own lives."

Loved ones, it's sad when you see that, but I bet you've seen it, as I have often seen it. It lays bare the weakness in so many lives that regard themselves as committed to Jesus. In fact, marriage does not take place because you love that person more than anybody else in the world, it doesn't. It takes place because it's God's will for you to be married. And I think I could speak for the dear sister's here if they will allow me to, and say they will feel far more stabilized and firm and solid with their man if they believe that they're together because God intended them to be together. I don't think if you guys say, "Oh, our sister's will feel less secure unless they think we love them more than we love everybody else in the world." I think they're skeptical enough of our great declaration of love! I think they'd rather base it on something firmer, like the will of God written into the foundation of the world.

And oh, it is more solid loved ones, it is. That's the whole meaning of those vows, "I Bill take thee Audrey to be my lawful wedded wife. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, til death us do part. And there to I give you my promise." That's the meaning of that vow. That vow cannot be made just because you think you love this person more than you love everybody else in the world. That vow can only be made because God had made that marriage in heaven; he intended you two to be together, and so you stay together whether you feel you're in love or whether you don't feel you're in love.

And of course you know too, that that heresy that marriage takes place because you love one person more than everybody else in the world is also the explanation of the dreadful chaos in which marriage exists in our society. I think all we guys know about the typical attitude of the other men in our businesses who say, "I don't seem to love her anymore. I just don't feel it anymore; I don't feel that magic, don't feel that electricity." And that's cause enough for them to begin to go around with another woman or to begin to take friendships up with other people, because it seems to be that they think marriage exists because you feel that electricity or you feel a feeling and once you cease to feel that feeling, then there's no longer any cause for the marriage. It's foolishness, its foolishness.

Marriage is there forever because God intended you two to be together. Loved ones, that means that it's possible for us to obey the first and greatest commandment and that commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with

all thy might.” [Deut. 6:5] It’s possible to do that once you’ve settled that marriage is built on God’s will for two people; it is not built on your love being greater for that person than for anybody else in the world. Once you settle that, you are able to begin to concentrate on setting your love on your Maker.

Loved ones, until you’ve done that do you realize you can’t love anybody -- do you realize that? Until you’ve finally settled that God is the one you owe more to than anybody else in the world, that God gave you those fingers, and he give you this face, and he give you that body that you have, and he gave you those clothes, and he give you that job, and he has given you the little insights you have in your mind and then on top of that, he has taken the very dirtiest thoughts that you have had, he has taken the very worst habits that you have formed in your own personality, he has taken the most miserable and the most poverty-stricken resentments that you have ever felt and he has taken them into his own self on Cavalry and he has allowed the wrath of God to burn those out inside him.

When you realize that; that nobody else has done that for you and you begin to see that you owe everything to your God, then you are able to begin the big job of starting to love him above everything else. But you can’t do that while you still think that you ought to divide your love up, and that’s what some of us think, you see. Some of us think, “Oh well, love is two ounces to my wife, one ounce to my child, half an ounce to my dog, an eighth of an ounce to my pastor, a sixteenth of an ounce to the rest of the people in the church.” We think that love is something that you divide up. Do you realize there’s only one person you love if you think that’s what love is? There’s only one person you love if you think that’s what love is – number one -- you’ll be loving number one; yourself, and you’re actually just pretending to give affection to these other people. Actually -- you’re the one that you love.

Love is not something to be divided up. Love is the whole and complete and absolute devotion of your whole life, that’s it. That’s it, loved ones. That’s why you have to be careful on the second commandment that Jesus mentioned in the New Testament. He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your strength, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And some of us think, “You see? That’s it: you love God with so much and then you love your neighbor with so much -- just equally as much as you love yourself. So okay, I love God with seventy percent, and I love my neighbor with, let me see, fifteen percent, now myself fifteen percent. But, I can’t love my neighbor unless I really do love myself, so okay, fifteen percent I love myself and then I’ll start concentrating on my neighbor.”

We never get that far -- we never get as far as the poor old neighbor. It’s a total misconception of love; love is not that. Love is the total and absolute devotion of your whole life to one person, and then that person -- your dear God in heaven -- sheds abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit a love for him and for his love for others. You are then able to love your friends at work in the right way, you love your wife in the right way, you love your children in the right way, and you love your colleagues in the right way. But that’s the way it works loved ones and then you actually love yourself in the right way too. But it comes, first, from devoting your whole love to God. If that isn’t the explanation, you do see that you’re in real difficulties with Deuteronomy 6:5 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your strength, and all your might.”

You can imagine your wife grabbing at your coat and saying, “What! You’re gonna love with all your heart; well is none of it for me? All your might, there’s none of it for me? All your strength,

then there's none of it for me." It's a real problem, a philosophical problem, a domestic problem too if you say that love is something that you divide up like that. It isn't. Love is the whole and total and absolute devotion of your whole being to the only person who deserves it: your dear God who made you; your dear God who saved you and redeemed you. It's the same as that little guy who made a little sailing boat and then went out and sailed it; it blew away and he lost it. Later he was walking downtown and in a pawnshop he saw the sailing boat again, so he went in and bought back his own sailing boat and said, "It's doubly mine because I made it and I bought it back." It's the same with us; we are doubly the Savior's, because he made us, first of all, and then he bought us back from the mess that we sold ourselves into.

So we owe him everything, loved ones. You owe your God everything. And if you give him all the attention and devotion of your heart, he will shed abroad in your heart a love for your wife that will be love, real love. So few of us men know anything about real love, and I suppose you ladies are the same: we are a society that talks about love and we know so little about love. That's why I suggested that so many of us marry and have this idea of marrying so that we won't be lonely in our old age. Or we marry because everybody else is marrying, or we marry because we want protection. Or we guys marry because we want excitement and exhilaration. It has nothing to do with love, nothing to do with love at all.

Love is what Jesus showed to the dear old leper with the withered flesh. There was no desire to have that leper in bed with you; no desire to be close to that leper. No feeling that that leper will do you any good. No feeling that that leper would be anything but an unpleasant smell in your presence. No feeling that you'd get anything from that leper, but he put himself in the shoes of the leper and that's how he loved you and me. He put himself right in our shoes. He has experienced you more than you have experienced you, do you know that? Jesus knows you better than you know you. He has experienced depths of your conscious mind that to you are subconscious or unconscious.

Jesus put himself into the shoes of the leper and thought of himself as the leper and did to the leper what he would want God to do to him. That's a little touch of what love is: love is putting yourself in the other person's shoes; it's wanting the very best for the other person. That's the difference between human love and divine love. Human love is either the Eros love, erotic; it just wants physical and emotional satisfaction. Or its philia love, it's a kind of friendship, brotherly love, the love that you have for somebody because you have something in common with them - you play games together or you go fishing together, but it's still a selfish thing; you're getting something from them. But agape love is the love that Jesus has; a love that just flows out of his heart as a result of his love for God; a love that puts itself in the other person's shoes. That's the kind of love that our marriages need.

There isn't a mum or a dad here tonight, there isn't a husband or wife who has not turned around in bed at night and cried themselves to sleep, or just sobbed quietly to sleep. Why -- because the other person doesn't understand them, and so often doesn't want to understand them. There are thousands, and maybe every husband and wife whoever married, have experienced something of that; where the other person does their best, but they somehow don't get into my heart and know what I'm thinking.

Loved ones, it's that love that makes a difference to marriage. Most of us husbands and wives of course try to get that, and that's why we're always saying, "What are you thinking? What are you thinking?" We're trying somehow to, in a way, get into the other person's heart, but so often we're

so filled with ourselves, and so full of our love of ourselves that we can't get ourselves into the other person's shoes. Loved ones, only the Holy Spirit can enable us to do that. Love, real love, is putting yourself into the other person's shoes and thinking, "What would I feel like if I were them?"

That's of course God's plan for his body [the church]. His plan for his body and in fact for all people in the world is that everybody would feel far more than the greatest husband and wife feel. That is, that everybody would feel they were more than married. Everybody would feel there are other people who care about me more than they care about themselves. That's God's plan for this body here, and it's his plan for everybody on earth. It's a maturity into which we have to ask the Holy Spirit to bring us. Now I agree completely with you; churches do not like that kind of thing, and churches don't practice that kind of thing. Churches make a very clear distinction between the family unit and the rest; you ought to give something to the rest, but not as much as you give to the family unit. Most churches organize themselves on that basis that the body of Jesus is not meant to be like that family unit.

The body of Jesus is meant to be a place where everybody loves everybody equally as much as they do themselves and where everybody puts themselves in the other person's shoes, and this is something God is trying to teach us in our [church] houses. I don't know if all of you know, but we have houses; several frat houses on campus and several houses on other parts of the campus where brothers and sisters live together in Jesus' love and purity. They live and eat and do the things together that a family would do.

One of the things that the Holy Spirit, I think, is trying to show us more and more is that that love and that family love is different from camping out. Some of us guys are used to camping out, really we are! I remember at seminary we lived in our own room -- a bachelor's existence in the most hideous conditions; you know the way we can get our socks all in the wrong places, and we lived -- not in a home condition at all -- but just as we were ourselves and there's nobody else to bother about than us. Now one of the things that the Holy Spirit is trying to teach us in our houses is love means treating everybody else in the house as your wife or your husband. It means putting yourself in the other person's shoes. I was saying in London a couple of weeks ago, it just does not happen in our (my wife and my) house that I come in, nod quickly to my wife and say, "I'm going to a movie tonight" and move out and then come back at ten o'clock and say, "Boy, that was a good movie. What did you do tonight?"

Marriage doesn't, believe it or not, work that way! You talk over what you're going to do in the evening and you decide whether the other person is going to enjoy what you're planning -- that's your first thought. Now, the Holy Spirit is trying to show us that in our houses; that real love is putting yourself in the other person's shoes, it's coming down to the living room after supper and seeing somebody sitting there and saying, "Oh, what are you going to do tonight?" That's the kind of love that God wants us to have for each other. It's the kind of love, of course, that will keep us from marrying the wrong person -- do you see that?

Do you realize that a lot of us, seems wild, but a lot of us marry because we're always left on our own at night. Nobody ever wants to know where we're going. Nobody is interested in whether we're going to a movie or not. You might think, "Oh no, a person couldn't marry for that." Yes, they could. Night, after night, after night, you get a bit fed up being alone and you'll do anything to skip it so many of us marry simply because we're lonely, simply because we feel nobody actually cares what we do. Nobody would notice if we were dead tomorrow, nobody would care whether we got to

work tomorrow or not. Nobody cares how we feel. Loved ones, real love is putting yourself in the other person's shoes and being interested in what they're thinking and what they're feeling.

Now, do you see that's his plan for us even here this evening? Because the tragedy here this evening is we all have very limited, controlled reservations about each other, we really do. Too often we come to a service like this and we have set in our minds what our relationships to each other will be. That's why I think sometimes you're hard on the English when you talk about their class system, because I think all of us have our little class systems. We have our inner circle that we could go and have coffee with, we have our next circle that we might have a three minute conversation with after the benediction, and then we have our outer circle where we just say, "Hi" and get out the door fast. That isn't love, and it isn't freedom, and it isn't liberty. I'm not saying, by any means, that we can all spend all the night talking with each other; but our hearts need to be open to that -- that's what love is about.

That's why Jesus is so attractive to us: we really don't feel that he had favorites and we don't feel for one moment that he looks after the guy or the girl down the row from us and won't care about us -- we don't feel that for a moment. We feel he loves us all the same way and has done the same for all of us. That's what love is and that's the kind of love that God wants to break us into here as a body. We have so often shared that we're here together for life. As long as Jesus wants us together we're here for life. Your children are my children, and your responsibilities are my responsibilities, and your wife, if you die, is my responsibility, and my wife, if I die, is your responsibility. That's what love is about and that's what being a family in Jesus is about.

But do you see it can only come about if we die to these little home temples that we have? These little closed cells that are really just pagan families but we make believe that they are Christian families, and yet they have walls as high as any pagan family around them. Loved ones, until you give up completely that vision of love which is not love at all, there is no hope of you beginning to give your whole love to God and there is no hope of him being able to shed abroad in your heart a love that will make the family of God what it's meant to be. That's why you see so often how God points out the importance of having things in the right relationship when you compare family life with the life of his body. There are several plain places where you see it, but you certainly get one in 1 Corinthians 7:32, "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband."

Paul is outlining what so often is the case. We should not attack him because he is describing what the normal situation in the body of Jesus is so often. It is not God's will at all; the Father's will is that a husband and wife would love each other as much as they love everybody else in the world and in the body of Jesus, and that they would spread that love. So God's will is that every husband and wife that come into that place of quietness and contentment and rest with each other, will spread that contentment and rest and that relaxation with thousands of other people. But what Paul writes is true: that once a husband gets his wife, once a wife gets her husband, all they think about is each other and their little home, and getting the furniture together, and setting up a little place where they can be sure of attention.

Loved ones, it's a parody of what God wants. You can see the other way when the love is an open love that is under the control of the Holy Spirit; then your relationships are controlled by Jesus.

Do you know how many girls are heartbroken at a normal meeting in an evening because some guy obviously preferred the other girl that seemed to be better looking? Do you know? Do you know how many of us guys have that kind of experience? It's because our love is not under Jesus control at all; our love is just a desire for our own pleasure and our own satisfaction so we go for whoever seems to have the scintillating personality, whoever seems to have the looks, whoever we like to be with. Jesus chose the leper, and Jesus chose the little tax gatherer that everybody hated.

You can see the health that comes into a body when you have brothers and sisters who love as Jesus Spirit guides them and directs them. You can see the control that comes into their lives when they begin to sense if some relationship is disturbing the peace in their hearts, so they begin not to care quite as much about what God's will is but rather how to please this other person or how to impress them or look good in their eyes. Immediately the Holy Spirit warns them that this is a love that is becoming an illicit love because it is one that is not under the control of Jesus. You can see, too, how the whole business of the similarity in the sexes comes into a right place, where there should be no difference, and no difference in feeling in our hearts as to whether we're with a man or whether we're with a woman.

It should be the same love that goes out to them from our hearts. It should be the same Christ-like love that wants the best for them, and as soon as we begin to feel something different depending on what sex we're talking to we need to watch: is this love that is under the control of God's Spirit? Some of us like to say, "Oh, no wait a minute isn't it different? How would you ever have intercourse if you don't have erotic love?" And of course the beauty of intercourse is that when it's under the direction of Jesus, when it's an unimportant incidental sideline, it's like shaking hands or putting your arms around a person -- it's a detail. You're filled with a concern for them and a desire for them to be the best that they can be and that's what raises all kinds of sexual interaction into the nth degree that makes it part of heaven. So, no loved ones, there doesn't have to be all this noise and thunder and lightening of passions and physical emotions that overwhelm you and take you out of any hope of being controlled by Jesus voice -- no. It's possible to be controlled by Jesus' voice and it's possible for every love to be under his control and yet for you to have a full, real sexual relationship with your husband or your wife when you come to that place.

Anyway, most of us know that that isn't a problem; the problem is that so many relationships which aren't meant to come into marriage at all are absolutely blown apart by us getting the physical and the emotional side into the middle of it when it really is just a nuisance to the relationship. What God has in mind for us is a love that is, as Timothy says, its love out of a pure heart. Love out of a pure heart will have a clean conscience and a sincere faith. That's the kind of love that God has in mind for us, but it only comes about when we at last devote ourselves holy to our God and determine to love him and Jesus with all our heart, with all our strength, and with all our might.

That love alone brings rest to us, do you know that? I think every husband and wife would testify to that: when you love your dear one a little more or a little wrongly, there comes a restlessness into your heart; you find yourself getting into positions that really aren't God's best for you, and you know they aren't, but you're drawn by wanting to please the other person, into something. So when God's love is uppermost in the heart, there's rest and there's peace in every marital relationship and there's rest and peace in every boy-girl friendship. But when the love for the other person becomes more important to you than God, there comes in that restlessness; you feel yourself losing your peace and being drawn out into other things.

That's why it's so foolish for us to mix up our love of God with love of a girl or a guy. It's death once you start loving God for the sake of the other person. It's death because it isn't love for God at all, it's just pretend love: the love that dominates your life is actually love for the other person. So it is interesting that, in a way, you can only truly love a girl, you can only truly love a guy, you only truly love a husband, or truly love a wife, and you can only truly love a friend or a colleague when you love God above everybody else. And then through the Holy Spirit, because of the consecration of your affections, he gives you a gentle, kindly love that expresses itself in exactly the right way for all the other people.

I would ask you if you've come to that love of God. In fact I'd ask you what you do love really. I mean we guys, what do we love -- what do we really love? That is: what do we want more than everything else in the world? Do you see how far we are from saying, "I want what God wants more than anything else in the world?" How far are we from saying that? What do we love? And you sister's, what do you really love -- truly? What do you really love most of all? What could you least do without in this life? What's the dearest thing to you? Now that, loved ones, is what is stealing peace from your heart and that is what is preventing you from loving everybody the way Jesus loved us.

I have so much to say -- but do you have any thoughts or do you have any comments or questions or testimonies? To the guys I'd say we're fools while we keep saying this is idealism. Sooner or later we'll come to this. So often the girls have a little more control over things than we have, but we're idiots when we keep on thinking that you can feed passion a few scraps and it'll hold it and control it. Really brothers; it doesn't, you know it doesn't. Whatever our society says, we are meant to live in purity and we can live in purity, we can.

Should we pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, we are so used to hearing that you love us, and Lord it's only at times we glimpse Cavalry and sense a little what lies behind Cavalry; that you actually did in a sense go to hell for us, that we realize how much you have given your whole self to us. Lord Jesus, we see that that's our first debt; that it is true what Saint Francis used to say -- that we live in the middle of a great unpaid debt, and Lord that debt is the first one for us to pay. Lord Jesus, we ask you by your Holy Spirit to expose to us at this very moment any other loves that exist in our hearts besides you.

Lord we see now that no other love should exist, that it is a misconception of love to think that other loves should exist. We see that we should not feel guilty if we're able to say no other loves exist. We see that love means the devotion of our whole beings to you, the giving of our whole lives to you, the declaring to you that you have first call upon us. That whatever you want that's the thing we will do first; that we will give our time to you and our attention to you and our thoughts to you. That we will consult you first everyday, and that we will first see what you want us to do; that in every situation that we meet we will look up to you and consider what you would like us to do. Lord that is what love is. Then Lord Jesus as we do that, we know that you will shed abroad in our hearts, not only a supernatural love for you, but a love for other people; the love that you have. Dear Lord we see that our dear wives and husbands and friends, our boyfriend and our girlfriend, our colleagues at work, our friends here in the body, deserve something better than the old, selfish love that we so proudly offer them. Lord, they deserve the same love that you showed us.

Holy Spirit, we ask you now to settle us once and for all; enable us to give our whole selves to God, to love him first with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and might. And then will you shed abroad in our hearts that love for our dear friends. And oh Holy Spirit will you enable us, in this body here, to live the way we were meant to live on earth? Lord I pray especially for any dear soul here tonight who feels they have nobody belonging to them. Lord will you enable some of us tonight to so love them and so give them our attention and our friendship that they will know we belong to them, and they belong to us.

Lord, we would ask that you will baptize us as a family with love so that we will begin to be practical in our concern for each other and our interest in each other. We pray this Lord so that none of us may go away lonely tonight or any night, but most of all we pray this so that Jesus may be that first born among many brethren and that the world may see how these Christian's love one another for his glory.

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