

Real Love

Romans 12:16

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Have you ever tried to take a bottle cap off and you haven't had a bottle opener - you know, one of those snap-on caps with the serrated edge -- and you couldn't find the bottle opener? First of all, you try the rolling pin technique -- trying to hammer it off with the rolling pin. Then you go to the knife -- the pointed knife ploy -- and you push it up. Then you try the screwdriver and you try to gouge it off with the screwdriver. Of course, several broken bottles later -- and many bleeding fingers later -- you eventually decide, "Screwdrivers are made to screw screws, and knives are made to cut, and rolling pins are made to roll dough, and bottle openers are made to open bottles. You can't use one for the other."

Gradually that basic fact of life is hammered in upon us. As the years go by we gradually stop using coat hangers to open car doors and we begin to use keys like everybody else. We stop using bricks to jack our cars up and we begin to use jacks. We stop using clothes washing powder in the dish washer and we begin to use dish washing powder. Bit-by-bit, life gradually becomes smoother and smoother and the tragedies become weekly instead of daily - because bit-by-bit, we decide everything is made for a certain purpose. It only works right when it's used for that purpose.

So we apply that to most things in life and life gets a little better -- except that we, probably all of us in this room, have not applied that basic fact of life to the most basic purpose of all -- that is, to the purpose of our own existence. Really, loved ones, we apply that daily in our work, and we apply that principle daily in our homes -- that everything is made for a certain purpose and it only works right when it is used for that purpose. But we fail to apply that to the most basic purpose of all -- to the purpose of our own existence. It may amaze you, but it's probably true, that every one of us during this past week -- indeed probably this very day -- have suffered because we have not applied that purpose to our own lives.

In other words, most of us here base our lives on an absolute and total misconception of their purpose. Most of us are using them for that misconceived purpose. That's why so many of us experience so much pain and so much frustration. That's why so many of us in our lives feel it's like one great experience of trying to take a bottle cap off with a knife or a screwdriver.

We seem to spend so much of our life with bleeding hands or bleeding emotions or frustrated feelings. The reason is that we are living our lives for a purpose for which they were never created. That is, most of us believe that the talents we have and the abilities we have are here for us to sustain and further our own lives here on earth.

Most of us here believe that the talents we've been given and the abilities we have are given to us for the sake of furthering our own futures and our own welfare. I wouldn't blame you at all if you said, "But brother, that's what everybody has taught us. Our teachers have taught us that. Our parents have taught us that. The books teach that. Everybody says that."

They say, "You've got a talent -- okay use it. Make the most of it." What they normally mean is, make the most of it for yourself. Try to get yourself a nice home. Get yourself a nice wife. Get yourself some nice children. Get yourself some security and enjoy this life -- that's what you've

been given those abilities for. Look at the poor people who haven't talents and haven't abilities. Now, you use yours fully. Isn't it true we've been encouraged to believe that what they mean when they say that is, use them fully to further our own personal welfare and well-being and to look after ourselves on this earth?

Now, if they've all told us that, why shouldn't we believe it? Well, loved ones, the reason you shouldn't believe it is because of the nature of love -- the nature of real love. We're all talking about love and we're talking a lot of foolishness because we make love into our own image. But the nature of real love gives the lie to that whole fairy story that we've just outlined about living for ourselves.

Now, you find it in the verse that we're studying -- it's Romans 12:16. It's one of those verses where the Revised Standard Version has followed some of the other translations in mistranslating. I'll try to share with you as simply as possible what the mistranslation is.

Romans 12:16, "Live in harmony with one another." That's not the most literal translation of the Greek, loved ones. I'll read the Greek to you and then I'll explain it. "Tó autó eis alleélous fronoúntes". "Tó auto" means "the same" or "the same thing" and "eis" is actually "towards" and "alleélous" is "each other" and "fronoúntes" is "thinking". In a Greek sentence, they put the participle last.

So it means "thinking the same towards each other". But our translation has translated it as if it is thinking the same -- and "alleélous" which is "among each other". That's the translation you get in Romans 15:5 where it talks about thinking the same thing among each other, which means think the same thing together -- think it all together.

In other words, it's unanimity; be of the same mind; agree about your doctrines; agree about the things you believe in life. That's normally the translation of "en" but here it is "eis" and it means not "think the same among each other" but "think the same towards each other".

In other words, I should think towards you what you're thinking towards me. It's not so much live in harmony with each other. It's not so much here, "be unanimous" but it's "think towards the other person what you hope they are thinking towards you". This is the old Lenski, the old Lutheran book that I have used for 15 years now as a basis. I'll read to you what Lenski says about the translation.

He says, "Having in mind for another; the same thing that under like circumstances one has in mind for oneself. I am to want you to have what, if I was in your position, I should want myself to have. I am not generous to myself and niggardly toward you, nor think of myself but of you." That's what it means loved ones, that real love is thinking to you what I believe and want you to think towards me. It's put more clearly, what Donaldsons' say is the basis of fair business, "The golden rule". If you like to look at it, it's Luke 6:31.

Luke 6:31, "And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them." That's it, you see. Not so they'll do it to you, because the rest of the verse makes that clear, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same?" [Luke 6:32-33] So, it's not that basis.

It's think towards people what you would want them to think towards you, not so that they will, but just because you would want them to treat you that way. "And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much again. But love your enemies and do good and lend expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful even as your Father is merciful." [Luke 6:34-36] As you wish that man would do to you, so you do to them. Think the same towards each other.

In other words I am to think, what would I want you to do to me? What would I have once wanted for myself? That's what I have to want for you. It's really what we were taught as children but we kind of tip our caps to the thing and then go on and live our own old way. It's what we were taught as children: God first, others next and ourselves last. That's it, loved ones.

It's loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself. It's loving your neighbor in place of yourself -- that's what it is. It's loving your neighbor in place of yourself. It's regarding yourself as finished with, and your neighbor as the only person who matters, and giving all your attention to them. That is what is stated so clearly in that definition of love that Jesus gave us:

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". [John 15:13] Now you can't lay down your life for your friends and take care of your own life first -- no. If you lay down your life for your friends, it's the most blatant and blunt and practical declaration that your own life, as far as you're concerned, comes last -- and your friend's life comes first -- and you're putting his life in place of yours.

In other words, real love is vicarious. It's treating the other person as if they were yourself, the way you used to want yourself to be treated -- that's the way you treat them. In other words, you're not here to look after yourself -- you're not, loved ones. That isn't the purpose of your life.

You and I are not created to look after ourselves. God will look after us. We are created to look after the rest of us. That's it. I know it sounds wild but really it's the basic thing, you know, that we were brought up with as kids. It's just that in our contorted society, we switch the whole thing all round and we've made fun out of the great commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself" --but that's what it means.

It means you're not here to look out for yourself. You're here to look out for me, and I am here to look out for you. God is here to look out for you. So if you and I will look after the rest of the people in this world, God will look after us --that's his promise, you see. That's a straight deal. That's his agreement with us: you be to others what I am to you and I'll be faithful. I'll never leave you nor forsake you. But if you start looking after yourself, I have to leave off and you'll be left with yourself as your only hope. But I tell you, commit your care on to me because I care for you. Put your life in my hands and then take everybody else's life into your hands -- and make it your one desire that their lives will be happy. That's it, loved ones.

You're here not to look out for yourself but to look out for the rest of us and if you do that, God will look out for you. Loved ones, that's the purpose of our lives. You may sit there skeptical as you like, but if you won't live according to that purpose, you will bark your shins against the very heart of reality, and you will find yourself in misery after a life that has been lived for the wrong purpose.

Every time you live for yourself -- however subtly and cynically and cleverly and sophisticatedly -- you're living for a purpose that you were not made for. Your personality isn't created for that. Your abilities aren't created for that. You don't operate right when you live that way. You will continually trip over reality. You will continually be miserable -- you know it already.

You know why you feel good when you do something for somebody else. You know you feel good. You know how great you feel when you spend a day doing something for somebody else and they can't pay you back -- but you know how good you feel. It just feels good inside. But you and I know fine well the difference between Hughes and Schweitzer -- you know that.

If I asked you, "Would you like to die like Howard Hughes or would you like to die like Albert Schweitzer?" -- you know how you would answer. You know you'd say, "Here is a man, Hughes, who seemed to spend his whole life looking after himself -- and he lived in misery and malnutrition, died of malnutrition and lived lonely and hated by even the people who were around him." Schweitzer lived constantly for other people and he died in contentment and in peace.

Loved ones, we're made to look after each other. We're not made to look after ourselves. The great error that so many of us, if not all of us, fall into is that we constantly miss that. We sink back into the narrowness and the pettiness and the withering, shriveling experience of looking after ourselves and our own narrow, petty interest -- instead of bursting into the liberty of this life that is lived looking after other people. Loved ones, it's fun!

It's fun to live your life looking after other people and thinking, "What does that person need? What does that person want? What can I do to help that person?" That's exciting. It's liberating. It's freeing. Your God, whose nature is unselfishness, will reward you by taking care of your life.

See, it's not just martyr-like or noble or high-minded to be unselfish -- it's realistic. The nature of our Creator is love. God is love -- that's unselfishness. That's giving yourself to other people so that they can be happy. Forgetting about yourself -- that's the nature of our God. That's the person who made you. You can't go further back, you know. Behind him there isn't Sears -- there isn't!

Behind Him there isn't Japan and the manufacturing operation. He is it. You can't go beyond God. He is the one who made you and me. He originated us. What he is, loved ones, you and I are. It's the nature of the beast. It's our nature to look after other people. When we look after ourselves instead, our lives become miserable and small and eventually they shrivel up and they die.

The great error of course of our society, is that either we reject that completely or we give our own little twist to it. Here's our twist: Make your own fortune first and then go into politics. Make sure you've built up your stocks and shares, and then give yourself for the sake of society. We look at the guys that do this and we think, "Yeah, yeah" -- but we're doing it ourselves because we've translated, "Love God and your neighbor as yourself" as "Well, I love God, then I love myself and then I love my neighbor as myself." You see, that's the only way I can know how to love my neighbor. I am a bit dumb, you know, and I have to love myself first to find out how I love my neighbour. So the thing to do is, take care of your own things first, after all that's natural (and so we say "Christian", but it isn't, it's natural and carnal) and, take care of yourself -- love yourself first and then love your neighbour."

You know what we do? We miss the best of both worlds. We get the worst of both worlds because we

take onto ourselves the whole burden of our own lives, taking care of ourselves and making sure we have enough. Then, we try also to take on the burden of taking our neighbors' lives upon our hearts and taking care of them as well. It's an unbearable burden. Many of us, anyway, have to spend so much time taking care of ourselves that we never get around to our neighbors. When we do get around to taking care of our neighbors, we see it as a challenge to taking care of ourselves and as a competing desire or motive -- and so we're never absolutely happy doing it.

So we take care of them but we never get the full joy out of philanthropy or out of altruism because we cannot give ourselves wholly to it. We're keeping in the back of our minds, "Who's going to watch my stuff? I better look after myself." So, by a great lie, Satan has deceived all of us into this very hard-headed, clever, wise, prudent attitude to love. He has stolen from us heaven and he has cast us into hell.

Loved ones, the miracle of the whole thing is that you gamble everything. It's all or nothing. You gamble everything. You say, "God, you are love. You say you are and certainly from what I can see you've done here, given us all this and given your own Son. You are love. God, I am going to live like that. I am going to regard myself as not in existence at all. I am going to regard myself as simply part of the life-support system for my friends. Lord, it's up to you --if you want to let me die, let me die. If you want to keep me, keep me. If you want to make me poor, make me poor. If you want to keep me rich, keep me rich. Lord, I am now going never to turn back."

Loved ones, one look back and the bitterness of salt fills your life. One look back and you turn to salt. That's why so many of us are missing it. Oh yeah, we're helping each other but with such an eye to ourselves and with such a look back at how we're doing that we miss the wonder of it. We miss the beauty of it. So what does it mean in practice?

Well, you get a job that uses your abilities the best way possible. Many of us have not been able to get the job that we think we should have -- so in that case, you do what God said. He said, "Subdue the earth". He said, "Six days shalt thou labor". So, you get a job. You get work that you can possibly get, and then you treat those at work as you would have wanted them to treat you when you were still alive. But now that you've been crucified and raised with God to the right hand, you know that your Father is going to take care of you. So, you don't need to think what you would like but you think, "Now they are me. Now how are they?"

So he comes into the office. On a very cold morning you think, "What would I like him or somebody to do for me or to me at this moment? Well, I'd like them to help me with my coat." So you go over and help him off with his coat. You think now, "Boy, the drafts are over there and it's warm over here -- and I am in this seat because I am here first. If I were him, I'd like me to give him that seat", so you go over and you say, "Listen, why don't you sit over here out of the draft?" Then you think on a cold morning, "What would I wish somebody would do for me?" Boy, I'd love someone to bring me over a cup of coffee and ask me, "Do I take milk or how do I want it"? So, you do that.

In other words, you put yourself into the mind of your friend at work, your colleague, and you regard yourself as part of his life-support system. Now loved ones, I know what rises in your dear heart, "He'll walk over the top of me. He'll treat me just as a slave."

That's really up to your God, isn't it? That's really up to your Maker. It's not up to you because you know where that consideration has got you in the past. You've ended up doing nothing for them or what you've done has been kind of reluctant and certainly not filled with the generosity and the

preoccupation with him that brings home to him that you really love him. So you give yourself to the other person.

Marriage. You're concerned about marriage. You're concerned about whether you'll get married or not. You have your eye on a certain guy or on a certain girl and it's not looking too good. You turn your eyes off that completely and you begin to pray. You begin to want them to have the best marriage they possibly can and have that marriage whether it's with you or with somebody else. You begin to pray with a clean heart and clear motives, "Lord, will you enable that person to meet the neatest person in the world so that they will have a great marriage?"

You want for the other person what you used to want for yourself. In other words, if it's your partner, you begin to think, "How are they feeling at this moment? What are they thinking of? What is this marriage like for them?" You begin to think, "What would I want it to be for me?" Then you forget yourself and you work to make that for them what you would have wanted it to be for you.

Apart from anything, it's fun -- but the big thing is its delivery. It enables you to transcend self. It enables your life to begin to operate for the purpose for which it was created -- which was not to look after yourself -- but to look after the rest of us.

After the benediction this morning, you immediately think, "Now what would that person most like? How could I make that person's afternoon happy?" You count your money. You find out how much you have so you could spend it to take them to lunch or to do something for them -- and you do that.

You do to them what you would normally and automatically think the great "me" ought to have done for me. It's just the beginning of life. It's the beginning of life. Loved ones, it takes a strong step because we are imprisoned inside ourselves. But do you see what it means? It means you laying all your resources and all your abilities at the feet of the rest of us -- living for the rest of the world and trusting God to take care of you. Now that's real love. That's thinking the same towards each other and that's what Christian living is about.

There are a couple of things that are in my heart that I think we do need to think of. If you saw the television program this morning with Charles Kuralt, you saw the poor wee souls who are out of work. Now I know some of us are out of work, but it seems that the nation is breaking under the burden of the present situation. I would ask you to seriously think of writing to your congressman or to your senator.

You remember we once did this when we were trying to get entrance visas for the group of us in England. We wrote to the Prime Minister --it was Edward Heath at that time -- and it changed the whole thing around. 700 of us wrote to him. The next time Myron went to the office that issues the visas, the lady said, "Oh Mr. Kliewer, this has been taken out of my hands to a higher level." Do you remember how it turned the thing around?

Now, I would ask you, will you consider writing to your senators or your congressman and say whatever you think is reasonable? I frankly myself think, stop fighting inflation. Depression is the problem. Reduce the interest rates and get money back into the businesses and let's get this system going. I am not against the nuclear weapons, but I think it's time we started to see that our own people are dying and are in misery here. It's time to start sharing the money round a little more sensibly and then maybe if you can have MX, all right, but the big thing is, get the economy moving.

I would ask you to put yourselves at this moment in the shoes of those wee souls that some of us saw on television and those of us here who have no jobs. Now you're in the position where you can spend money on a stamp to write -- or you can spend money for a phone call. If you phone, that's very often more effective to Washington -- or you can send a telegram or a wire. I think loved ones, that we have a responsibility.

I think we have a responsibility to speak out and say, "Now let's get it moving." We have the ability in our nation -- we all know that. What's killing us is the lack of capital. We can decide this moment to pump the money in and to say that inflation is not the problem. It's depression that is the problem. Let's get the money into the system. Let's get the interest rates down. Let's get the thing moving so that we get back to work.

I think we can do that. I think we can do that for loved ones whom we cannot see. Then, this morning, would you at least speak to the person beside you and at least find out if they're working? Would you? At the end after the benediction, will you speak to the person beside you and ask if they're working and then will you try to find out a little about each other? That's the only way I can see that we would avoid a chaotic situation because probably, if we said we were all giving money everywhere, then maybe we would not be able to contain the thousands of people that will come next Sunday!

So it seems to me that our responsibility as a family is to put ourselves in each other's shoes. So I'd ask you, first of all, will you consider writing and if the 700, 800 or 900 of us write this morning, then that will certainly come home to our representatives and to our senators. Say to them, "Get the show moving. Get the economy moving. Do whatever is needed to lower the interest rates and to get the capital in" -- but say whatever you want to or whatever you think.

Maybe you just want to say, "Ronald, you're doing a great job." All right, do that -- but we should write and we should tell them and we should stand up and be counted. Then, will you speak to the person beside you, after the benediction? Just find out how they are and if they are working. That's good if they are -- then probably they are all right. But if they're not, will you just talk a little and find out a little about them? Then will you seriously think of what you could do to help somebody else in that situation? Then tomorrow, don't say, "Good, I had my day off on selfishness yesterday. I feel wonderful."

Tomorrow morning, when you go into the office, would you begin to think, "That person is coming into the office -- now I wonder what they're feeling? Well I know what I would be feeling if I were them", -- and then live for them. Give something to them. Do something for them. Love is practical and faith is down-to-earth and real.

So loved ones, will you begin? The way to enter into Jesus is to do what Jesus Himself is doing this day and He is wiping people's feet with His towel and He is lifting people's burdens. That's what we're here for. That's Christmas -- it's meant to be all the year round.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the practical expression of love. We have to think the same towards each other. What we would like people to be thinking towards us, we are to think towards them. We're to live for each other, not for ourselves. Lord, we thank you that the only real way to enter into you this day is to do what you do -- and then you send your Spirit into us -- and you take care of our own lives. Thank you, Lord.

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.