

Love is Action

Romans 13:10a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Theoretical physicists believe they're approaching the point where they will be able to explain the universe in one simple equation and they believe that there is some central equation that will do that.

Now, is there any basic principle that explains the existence of the universe? Is there any underlying value or attitude that not only explains how and why the universe was created, but that maintains that universe, and that enables life to continue? Is there any basic principle or attitude that makes sense of our own lives; that makes sense of your own personal life and makes sense of the life of the universe as a whole?

Is there any principle as simple as that equation that the physicists are hoping to discover? Yes, there is. You will find it if you look at your hand -- where did your hand come from? Where did you buy it? Well, you didn't buy it. Well, when did you make it? You didn't make it. Then how did it come to be there? "I just found it hanging at the end of my arm, that's where it has always been." Well, if you didn't make it and you didn't buy it, and you don't ever remember getting it, does anybody know where you got it? "Of course," you'd say to me, "my mom had it inside her before it ever got to me, so she gave it to me." In fact if you were to ask your mom she'd say, "Yes, that's right; I had it inside of me. And I want you to know I looked after it before you were aware it was there. I actually looked after you when you were too small to even lift a cup to your lips. I looked after you, and when you didn't have the sense to know when to come out of the snow, I took care of you. Yes, I gave you that hand, and I took good care of you before you ever knew me. I gave you all these things. You didn't get anything of what you have -- your hair, your nose, your eyes, the mountains, the rivers -- all these things, they've all been given to you."

And if you said, "Oh, that's the principle: it's giving. That's the principle that explains everything; that everything we see and everything that we are, has been given to us." No, it's even more than that. If you asked your mom why she gave you this hand and why she gave you all that care before you could take care of yourself, she'd say, "Oh I loved you. I loved you -- that's why I gave to you." In fact, many of us are born because our mom loved our dad -- really did love him; so all of us are here because somebody else loved us.

In fact, all the institutions in our world -- the hospitals and the schools and all the rest of the things that keep our life steady in this earth of ours -- all of them started the same way. The dear old pioneers that started the first schools and the first hospitals would say the same thing: "We believe that everything we got was given to us. Everything we have came because somebody loved us. And in fact we believe that the Creator, the maker of the mountains and the rivers, loved us and gave us these things. So that's why we wanted to give these things to other people. He wanted us to enjoy the things he enjoyed, and that's why we started these hospitals and these schools." Everything that holds life together in our world comes because somebody loved and somebody wanted to give to somebody else.

It's very interesting, isn't it -- however much you and I may disagree about different philosophies or different theologies, however much we may discuss all kinds of theories of the universe, we're

all pretty well agreed that the basic principle that has made life possible at all, the basic value or attitude that maintains life today is love. Love is basic to the whole operation. You even find it in the world of nature, where there seems to be self-sacrifice built in. So I think none of us would disagree about that. Why then are so many of our lives in such a mess?

Love is the heart of the nature of the Creator, but because we use the word "love" glibly, shallowly, and emptily, we mock it; we make fun of it. We take our Creator's name in vain and we pretend. Love doesn't do those things. Love fulfills the law and it's actually much the same with all the other things. It's the same with the daughter who says, "I really love you, Dad. I really love you, but I just don't believe in marriage, and I don't believe in that kind of commitment. I don't think it's necessary. But I do want to live with this guy for awhile. I know you don't like it, but I frankly think it's old-fashioned and I just want to do this. I believe I really love this guy, and I really love you. I want you to know I really love you. But I am going to live with this guy."

No, you don't really love your Dad. You don't. Let's just face it and make it plain that what you're really saying is, "I hate you. I despise you. You're a silly old man and I don't have any respect for you." But let's say that. Let's be brave. Let's be courageous. Let's be honest, but let's not make fun of things. Let's not make fun of language and make fun of truth because of what Jesus said, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6.)

So loved ones, that isn't love, you see. Don't call that love. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love at least doesn't do that. It does a lot more than that, but it at least fulfills the Ten Commandments: it doesn't commit adultery, it doesn't steal, and it doesn't bear false witness. Love, at least, does no wrong to a neighbor.

You see, this would apply to us husbands and wives, to all those of us who live together who maybe aren't involved in divorce proceedings or aren't involved in separation or that kind of thing. It applies to us, too, because you ladies will say, "I just wish he would show some love that I can see. He tells me how much he loves me, and he tells me all the things that he wants to do for me, but if he would just come home at night in time for dinner, that would mean a lot. Or if he would vacuum the floors a little, if he would just do something that showed that he did love me, and then I would believe he loves me." But you same ladies have to see that that love, just as it does no wrong to you, does no wrong to other people. So you have to see that you don't talk about others behind their backs, because love does no wrong to a neighbor.

And we men are the same, you see. It seems to me, love does no wrong to a neighbor, that's what love is. And too often we guys are great on the big talk, and the chocolates, and the flowers, and all the rest of it, but no use in the ordinary, everyday actions that show that we care about the other person. And the truth is, real love does no wrong to a neighbor.

In other words, loving is doing -- it's acting. It's doing little things that make the other person know that you care about them and that you put them first. It is vacuuming, it is doing the washing at times, and it is doing the floors at times. It's being kind to other people in your business. It is refusing to take advantage of the other guy -- to go for the jugular. It is. It's doing those things even when you have the iron grip on the other guy and you can make sure once and for all that you have the upper hand in this business situation -- it's refraining from doing that. Love is doing

no wrong to a neighbor. It's a very ordinary, everyday thing.

Love is very practical. Love is really like faith. Faith is practical. Faith is not committing adultery. It's not stealing. It's not bearing false witness. So love is that too. You must agree we, probably more than any other people on the earth, will be ready to say, "I love you." Now maybe us men not so often! I don't know if you know that, but in America here, we're more ready to say "I love you" than probably any other nation in the world. But often we mistake the verbal expression for the actual essence of love.

The truth may well be that if you love you don't have to tell anybody that you love. They just know you love them. That's what the Bible says and that's what God says, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor." (Romans 13:10) Now, what is love? We've talked about this so often -- love isn't just giving things, it isn't just giving presents. Love, you remember, is defined by Jesus and maybe you'd look at that verse because it's so solid and so sure. It's John 15:13, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That's what love is. Love is not just giving things; it's giving yourself.

It's not just saying, "Oh I just give you myself. Here I am you lucky guy!" No. It's giving the things that you have: your abilities, your intellect, your emotions, your insight, your talents, your understanding. The physical or mental gifts that you have that the rest of the world regards as things to use for itself in order to preserve its own life, in order to prosecute its own cause, you take those things, and you give them to the other person for their use. You lay them at their feet, to bring about the best possible thing that you can think of for their lives. That's what love is. It's putting yourself utterly in the other person's shoes and it's pretending you are the other person. It's loving your neighbor as yourself -- in the way you used to love yourself -- that's what that means. Love is not loving you first, and then giving the remainder to the other person. Love does not love as long as it's convenient for you. Love does not love if you have time. Love does not love as you are able. Love is putting the other person first, and giving all that you have in your life to them for their good, and for their benefit. If you ever doubt that, you see, you only have to look at the dear man that gave us that classic definition of love.

Jesus did not experience dereliction and destruction on the Cross because of his own sin. He didn't, because the Bible says, "He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips" (1 Peter 2:22) that would cause his Father to withdraw from him. So when he cried out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 28:46), he really meant, "Why hast thou, of all people, forsaken me, of all people -- because there is no sin in me." He did not experience that dereliction and forsakenness because of his own sin, but because of your sin and my sin.

He took all that into himself and he laid himself out for us. He didn't bear in his own body his own sicknesses, because he wasn't sick. He bore in his own body our sicknesses. He took into himself every sickness that you have ever had and every sickness that you will ever have and he bore the agony of it in his own body. He didn't bear in himself his own, intractable old self, with all its anger, and its irritability, and its lust, and its disobedience -- he didn't. He had none of that inside himself. He took your "self", with all its bad temper, with all its jealousy and its envy and its pride, and in a few seconds he bore that in himself and he bore the agony of that being burned out of himself. So he gave up everything that he was for you. He bore all that for you. Yet he didn't have to bear any of it for himself.

Now, that's what love is, you see. It's giving you instead of the other person. It's not looking

after you first, and then helping them. It's laying yourself out utterly in place of them and for them and if you say, "But then what would happen to him?" Well, what did happen to him? He said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 24:46) And the moment you do that in your life, you begin to find that you are more loved than you ever knew -- that you are more loved than you ever believed possible.

The moment you commit yourself to a way of love, and to forgetting yourself, you suddenly find that there is some mighty one who is saying to you, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 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? (Matthew 6:25-27)

Isn't that true, with all our vitamins -- with all that we take? None of us can guarantee that we'll add one day to our life. "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? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." (Matthew 6:28-33)

If you stop looking after yourself, and start looking after the rest of us, the way some people have done with you in your lifetime, you'd suddenly find that you are more loved than you ever believed possible. And you'd see that there is an unseen hand that is beginning to take care of your affairs, and is beginning to supervise your finances, and is beginning to lay out a future for you that is far better than the one that you have tried to manipulate. That's it, loved ones.

Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love fulfills the law because love ends up having to depend utterly on the Father loving you in order to love other people. And the moment you do that, that moment life begins to lift for you. Now, I know what you're thinking -- I know because I am brought up in the same society: we're taught to look after ourselves. I know that, but loved ones; we're on the wrong track. That's why we always lack so much. That's why we never have time to look after anybody else, because we are working it the wrong way. You're intended to use your abilities and lay them at the feet of the rest of us and then your Creator lays all his abilities at your feet and your life works. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25)

You can change today. You can. You can change today because that is the heart of reality. That is reality. And there'll come a time in your life, whatever age you are, there will come a time in your life in another 30 years, another 40 years, when you will know that what I said is true. And you'll see reality in front of you, and you'll see that that is a heart of love. But then there'll be no time to change from loving yourself to loving others. Then you'll say, "What a fool I was --you mean this is the way it should work?" Yes, it is. So start now. Start now. If you say to me, "But the others aren't, the others aren't, the cynics, sure they aren't." The world has lost its way; it has lost reality. Stop looking at it. Stop looking at what they're doing in the media. Start living in love today. Start laying yourself out for others. Start forgetting yourself, for the benefit of others. Commit your marriage, your life, your career into the hands of the only one

who can take care of it

anyway -- the one who has it all planned -- even your Father, the one who is love. Let's pray.

Dear Father, we want to apologize to you, first of all, for taking part in this whole charade about love; using the word so glibly, not meaning it at all, and therefore trusting our own lives into meaninglessness. Father, we want to take back all that superficiality and shallowness. We know that you are love, and if your love is what we saw on Calvary, there's nothing superficial about it, and it takes all a man has got.

So Father, we want to thank you, first of all, that we wouldn't be here today if a mother had not shown some love to us, or a husband and wife had not shown some interest in each other. Father, we want to thank you for all the people that have loved us over the years; for those who took care of these bodies of ours when we couldn't have taken care of them ourselves. And then, Father, we want to tell you that we believe it is all because of you and your love. So Lord, will you keep your promise? Will you take care of us if we stop, now, taking care of ourselves first, the way we've been doing? And if we start putting other people first and start giving ourselves to bring about the best in others' lives instead of using ourselves to bring about the best in our lives?

Father, if we do that, will you come through for us? And will you look after the things that we are going to have to lay down now; the concerns we have about our career and our marriages and concerns we have about where we're going to live? Father we're going to lay these down now at your feet and ask you to take care of them. We know you'll take good care of them, but Lord, we put them in your hands.

Now we intend to turn around and attend to some business that we've left unattended for too many years. We're going to look now to the people that we live with at home, and those that we work with, and Father, we're going to start putting them first in our lives instead of ourselves, and start laying ourselves out for them. And Lord, we're going to stand back and see the miracle take place in our lives, of your love; similarly doing no wrong to us but doing us only good, just as it has done so far.

Father, we give ourselves to you for this purpose. Lord Jesus, you are the heart of love. We ask you to come in and take hold of us, and give us the power to do this for your glory. 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 to help us to be real this coming week, and forevermore. Amen.