

3rd Sunday after Pentecost
John 13:34,35
St. Matthew's

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"A Selfless Kind of Love"
Oconomowoc

Dear Friends in Christ,

The old axiom that "**a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush**" says the obvious. But people would rather have two birds in hand than just the one, wouldn't they? The unspoken corollary to that old axiom is that if more birds were available than two, people would grab for the three or the four. People are like that. Our desires always outrace our potential. We always want what is beyond our ability to obtain. The child that has come home from school wants two cookies rather than the one cookie his mother has said he can have before suppertime. The worker wants three weeks of vacation instead of two, and he is convinced that he deserves twelve paid holidays per year. On the other hand, the perennial gripe of management is that managers are always overworked and underpaid.

People are like that -- always desiring more than they have, holding two birds in hand, and wondering how they can capture three or four. And that's the stuff that frustration and dissatisfaction are made of. But then along with the frustration comes another side of us. As we run faster and faster to get more and more, we confess to a tiredness with this kind of perpetual rat-on-the-wheel running after more and more, and we say that we have an inner desire for peace. We crave a release from the anxiety that our perpetual running gives us. Why can't life be more on an even keel? So we're caught in a dilemma. Always wanting, wanting, yet on the inside of ourselves always craving peace, serenity, satisfaction, love.

Our world hasn't changed much from the days of Jesus. Jesus knew that the Pharisees who were much impressed with their high positions, but at the same time, always seeking more status. Jesus had dealings with the rich young man who refused to be separated from his money. He spoke like kind of a Dutch uncle to the mother of James and John who wanted her boys to sit in privileged positions beside the royal throne of heaven. And Je-

sus is acquainted with us and our own craving for wealth, status and power, and at the same time, peace and tranquility and love.

The message of Jesus that we are looking at this morning was spoken by him just before he went to be captured by soldiers of the high priest, denied by Peter, mocked by the Roman soldiers, condemned by the crowd and crucified on the cross. He puts into glaring contrast our constant grabbing for more with his own sacrificial love for the sinner, an absolutely **Selfless Kind of Love**, because it was a love that would reach out on Calvary to absolutely unlovely and unlovable recipients. Martin Luther reminds us in his explanation of the second article of the Apostles Creed that Jesus reached out in love to people like ourselves, people who are **without any merit or worthiness in us**.

I like to remind wedding couples that the inspired writers of the New Testament scriptures actually had to coin a new word for the Greek language when they wanted to share with us the incredible love of God and the incredible love of Jesus for undeserving sinners. The man-woman love that usually brings a young man and a young woman to the altar for marriage was known as **eros** love among the Greeks. The companionship and friendship that we crave and anticipate that we will find in marriage the Greeks called **philia** love. But how does one describe, or explain, or put into human language, the incredible love of God, the totally **Selfless Kind of Love** that Jesus demonstrated as he showed himself willing to mount the cross on Calvary for undeserving sinful people like ourselves? As I said, the inspired writers of New Testament added a new word to the Greek vocabulary. They called this selfless love of God and this selfless love of his Son Jesus **agape** love.

The truly remarkable thing about this selfless **agape** love of Jesus is that this love of Jesus for sinners can be wondrously transmitted to his followers. Jesus said, "**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**"

Jesus Christ offers a radical new approach to his believers. All of us were born as getters. Within hours of birth, we began to give clear evidence of this. We began crying for milk. And we remained criers for milk every single day thereafter. But then came for us a new birth in Christ, and that rebirth in Christ brought about a radical change in us. That rebirth in Christ changed our hearts and changed our attitudes. Jesus' new command entered our lives and shaped our thinking and gave a different direction to our actions. In short we became people affected by **agape** love, and it worked a miracle in us so that in us now is to be found a love that replicates the love of Jesus our Savior. Amazingly, we grabbing getters became infected with a **Selfless Kind of Love** like that of Jesus.

This amazing love to which Jesus called us is not the sweet drivel of human emotion or the masquerade love of gushy pietism. This is genuine **agape** love. It's a love for the unlovely and the undeserving. It's a love for sinners. It's a love for the fellow unfortunates all around me who are just like me, grubbing getters with two or three birds already in the hand, and yet running after more. It's a love for people who hardly deserve God's love, but who nevertheless receive it and enjoy it anyway, because of God's and because of Jesus' incredible grace and mercy and love for the sinner.

It strikes me that Father's Day is a good time to talk about this radical, new kind of love to which Jesus calls us as Christians. In a world that has gone horribly imperfect from the perfect state of its inception, our God has preserved something that I believe still mimics God's own incredible love for the world. Call it Father love. It's an amazing, wonderful thing. It is truly a reflection of divine love, a reflection of Jesus' love. It is an unconditional love, a love that overcomes the normal human desire for getting, getting, getting, and that changes to the very opposite -- giving, giving, giving, without any intention of getting a return on the investment.

I can tell you without a doubt that I enjoyed that kind of love in growing up, and it certainly had a marked effect on the way I've tried to be as a father myself. I suppose many of you other dads in the audience are also be able to think back and recall a

good loving father and would also say he had a profound influence upon you and on how you would behave as a father. If that was your experience I rejoice with you in that gracious gift that God sent your way. But I don't know much about very many of you fathers, so I can only speak for myself.

When we were teenagers we called my Dad "Fuzzy" behind his back. But it surely wasn't because he was warm and fuzzy. That was not the way he was raised and that was not his nature or personality. He just loved to show affection and attention to the babies whenever they came into our family, but after that, there weren't really any hugs and kisses left for the kids as they got older. But I can say without a doubt whatsoever, that I was loved -- loved in an unconditional sort of way. The standards were always set pretty high in our family, and sometimes we failed to meet those standards, but in the end, there was always the sense that my dad loves me, in spite of the gruffness of his ways, and my dad is proud of me, in spite of sometimes failing to meet the standard. That's a mighty special gift to give to a child. It's life-shaping. It makes a big, big contribution to who you are, and what you think about yourself, and how you will function and behave as a father yourself.

Dads, we probably make more of Mother's Day in the church than we do of Father's Day. I suppose that is because most of our pastors are fathers, and none of them are mothers. So we probably prefer to celebrate motherhood than fatherhood. But, to make up for deficiencies as pastor, we are celebrating father love today. And we want to remind every father among us that father love is best achieved when it grows out of the **agape** love that we spoke about earlier.

God gave us fathers an extremely important responsibility when he told us in Ephesians 6:4: **Fathers, do not exasperate your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.** That is without a doubt the greatest gift my father gave me. He was a man who knew he was loved and forgiven by his Lord, and that love of God in Christ created an **agape** love in him for his children, and for his wife, and for his students and for many, many other of God's people. The absolutely most shocking

Sunday morning of my life was the one Sunday when we did **not** go to church. There had been an argument early that morning between dad and mom, and that prompted him to make the announcement that we were not going to church that Sunday. He was in no frame of mind to worship God properly. How could he go to church and ask for God's forgiveness while he was still so angry with his wife. No, better to stay home from church that morning! That really hit home with me. But it was the only Sunday I remember as missing church as a child except for illness. The man was lead and trained himself by **agape love**, and with the exception of that one Sunday, he needed to bask in that **agape love**. And that **agape love** led him to understand, and to accept, and carry out his responsibility to bring up his children in the training and instruction of the Lord that they too might know **agape love**.

Fathers, God give you a similar encouragement, and fill you with a similar **agape love** that compels you to do the same for your children.

Amen.