

Sermon for February 3, 2019 “Knowing God: Love”

1 Corinthians 13

What's really important? Everyone in our world seems to have their agendas and thinks that theirs is most important. Each person thinks that their needs should be attended to before anyone else's. Each person had their issue: “save the whales,” “save the trees,” “save the children!” And everyone thinks theirs should receive the first attention.

There are a lot of important things, but what is the most important for the church? In serving God, what is most important? It is certainly important to have an understanding of God's Word so that we can be faithful to it. It is also important to have a discerning understanding of the situation of the world. It is also important to be able to proclaim the good news in a way that will catch people's attention and communicate the truth so that all can believe. And it is important to have a faith that leads us to give of ourselves - even our lives that others might receive Jesus.

But Paul, the great and effective Apostles of Jesus Christ, had another perspective. He said love was the most important thing we need for living a life in Christ. It doesn't matter if we have golden tongues or great wisdom or sacrificial charity. The thing that makes the difference is love. Love shows us the heart of God and in loving and experiencing love we know God. Now I could try to prove this truth or describe its applications to you over the next 45 minutes - well, 15 minutes. But instead I want to show it to you in the lives of three people.

Let's start with Millard Fuller. Millard was talented and intelligent young man. He applied his intelligence and talent to a marketing firm and became a millionaire by the time he was 30. Millard is also a very eloquent speaker. Anyone who had heard him speak in public would agree with that fact. He is also a charismatic leader. Among those who have followed him in his efforts are presidents, cabinet members, and Nobel prize winners.

But Millard Fuller is also a man of faith. After he had made his fortune in business, he gave it all away to the poor. He gave it away to join Koinonia farm, a Christian community in Georgia founded by Clarence Jordan the writer of the “Cotton Patch Gospels.” Millard's faith led him to give all he had to the poor and leave the board room for the barn. Millard is quoted as having said, “I see life as both a gift and a responsibility. My responsibility is to use what God has given me to help His people in need.”

But as good and important as all that is, it was love that made the difference in Millard's life. You see, Millard Fuller is the founder of Habitat for Humanity. It was love for God and love for his neighbor that led him and others to begin the movement that has used Biblical guidelines to fight the cycle of poverty. It was love that led them to take the hard road of not giving away houses, but of creating opportunities for people to take responsibility for their homes and truly own their own place to live. Despite all Millard Fuller's talents, it was love that made Habitat for Humanity happen. It was love that made him who he is. It was love that made the difference!

There is also the example of Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu. Agnes was a woman of strength and faith. At an early age she heard her call to serve God. When she turned 18 she answered that call by becoming a nun. It was then that she took the name that we know her by: Teresa.

Sister Teresa, not yet Mother Teresa, received her first charge: to teach in a girl's school in Calcutta, India. It was there that she fell into the ministry to the poor for which she is now famous. Listen as I read her account of the first time she picked up a woman from the street:

“The woman was half eaten up by rats and ants. I took her to the hospital, but they could do nothing for her. They only took her because I refused to go home unless something was done for her. After they cared for her, I went straight to the town hall and asked for a place where I could take these people, because that day I found more people dying in the street. The employee of health services brought me to the temple of Kali and showed me the ‘dormashalah’ where the pilgrims used to rest after they worshipped the goddess Kali. The building was empty and he asked me if I wanted it. I was very glad with the offer for many reasons, but especially because it was the center of prayer for Hindus. Within 24 hours we brought our sick and suffering and started the Home for the Dying Destitutes.”

(Malcolm Muggeridge, Something Beautiful for God)

Of course Mother Teresa went on to found a new order of nuns: the “Missionaries of Charity.” But all this was possible because of love. Mother Teresa said, "I realized that I had the call to take care of the sick and the dying, the hungry, the naked, the homeless - to be God's Love in action to the poorest of the poor." Once again it was love that made the difference!

Perhaps the ultimate example of the truth that it is love that makes the difference is Jesus Christ. Jesus had all things. He was the Lord of the Universe. He had the stars as his night lights and the planets as his footstool. And he gave up all things to come and live among us.

And Jesus was an excellent teacher. He had a knack for being able to illustrate almost anything. Crowds of people followed him forsaking work and food. Some even left family and businesses to follow him. Jesus even gave up his body to be nailed to the cross.

As important and good as all that was it was his love that made the difference. It was his love that led him to the cross. It was love that led Jesus to leave the ivory palaces of heaven to become a homeless Savior. It was love that led him to minister to the poor and the outcast. As one song says, “Why did they nail him to the cross when his love would have held him there?” Love made the difference.

If I could speak with the tongues of men and angels and give away all I have and be able to understand great things, it really wouldn't amount to a hill of beans. Love is what makes the difference. It was love that made Millard Fuller the business man become a modern-day monk and the leader of a world wide movement against poverty. It was love that made Sister Teresa, the nun and teacher, into Mother Teresa the leader of the sisters of charity. It was love that led the Father to give his only begotten Son. And it was love that led the Son to give his life for the liberation of the world.

Love was what made the difference and was important in these people's lives. So what's important in your life? Is it eloquence and knowledge? Is it family and home? Is it something as profound as faith and sacrifice?

All those things are important. But they mean nothing if they are not accompanied by love. All those things are good and some like faith and hope abide. But the greatest of these is Love! Love is what makes all those other important things meaningful.