How Deep the Father’s Love Memory Verse: 1 John 4:10

Feb. 18th, 2024 Scripture Reading: Psalm 36

**SLIDE 1: TITLE**

Let me paint for you a few different scenes. Each one is about the same thing.

SLIDE 2: COUPLE

Their eyes meet from across the room and each of them feels a swell in their hearts. They want to spend every moment together, to share life, to make plans, to grow. But for now, it’s all laughs and sparks. This is a picture of love.

SLIDE 3: FAN

The ticket is scanned as the attendees head to their seats. They have anticipated this show for weeks and are thrilled to finally be able to experience the forthcoming demonstration of talent. To say they are super-fans would be an understatement. This is a picture of love.

SLIDE 4: MOTHER

A woman sits at her elderly mother’s side. The tone of the doctor has changed. The prognosis is not good. As the end nears, time becomes more valuable and warm tears are mixed with good memories. This is a picture of love.

SLIDE 5: CHILD

A child waits nervously in his room for the hammer to fall. He got caught and he knows he is in trouble. He can’t help but ponder, “What will the consequences be?” Mom and dad discuss just down the stairs this very same question. This is a picture of love.

SLIDE 6: MUSICIAN

A man picks up his guitar again. He hums as he strums our a few chords trying to find that perfect melody. The lyrics seem to fit for now, but maybe the song just needs more time. The creative process is like that sometimes. This is a picture of love.

SLIDE 7: FATHER

A father goes through each room in the house, flicking off all the light switches as he gets ready to turn in for the night. He notices backpacks and toys laying around in one room, shoes and coats in the entry way, dirty dishes in the sink, a bag of chips left wide open in the pantry…There just isn’t enough time in the day to keep up with things. This is a picture of love.

SLIDE 8: JESUS

A man struggles to breathe. He has been wounded. He blinks hard as blood drips into his eye. He can’t move his arms or legs. His mouth is bone dry. He hears some people mocking, others weeping…he is innocent and yet he has been condemned to die on a Roman cross. This is a picture of love.

SLIDE 9: HEART

 Just a few days ago, our culture celebrated Valentine’s Day. And just a few days ago, the church commemorated Ash Wednesday. Two very different agendas collided: Paper hearts and candy and flowers on one side; dust on the other. Of those options, it is plain to see that, in the end, dust wins out. All the paper hearts, all the flowers, all the candy will eventually become nothing more than dust. As we proclaim, from dust we are made and to dust we shall return.

 But what about love? Valentine’s Day is a celebration of love, right? We show appreciation and affection to loved ones with a little gift. Does the fact that we are dust somehow negate that? I would say no. Indeed, a gift can communicate love for someone. Surely, we can celebrate love and commemorate dust all on the same day.

 But as we step into Lent, I want to make sure that we are defining love correctly, that we understand the true meaning of love. There are many ways to go about doing this…we could pull out the dictionary and comb through the listed definitions of love; we could do some research and maybe some polling to help our understanding. As we saw from the opening scenes, love come in many forms: physical attraction, parental discipline, commitment, creativity, and expression. It exists in many different contexts and situations. So, what exactly do we mean by this word “love”? Of course, it is imperative that we understand this concept of love through the lens of scripture. And being a music guy, someone who loves to worship through songs, I thought this song “How Deep the Father’s Love” reflects well the story of God’s love for us. So we are going to walk through this season of Lent with this song. And today we consider the title, “How Deep the Father’s Love”.

**SLIDE 10: TITLE SONG**

 The word “love” is maybe the most abused term in the English language. I love pizza and a cold Mountain Dew, I love music and a good guitar solo. I also love my wife. I love my children. So what does that all mean exactly? Let’s look to scripture to find out.

 The shortest definition of love may also be the least helpful. It is found in 1 John 4:8 and it says simply God is love. God is love, love is God. It is short and simple, but now we have to ask, “Who is God?” But thankfully John does not leave us in this quandary. John is very helpful. Let’s go back to verse 7, “Dear friends,” he says. That is a rather pleasant way to start. The actual word here from the Greek is “beloved” (*agapetos).*

SLIDE 11: 1 John 4:7-8

John uses this word over and over in his letter. He also interchanges it with “little children.” So, John is speaking to his readers as a dear friend, a beloved elder. He is using the highest terms of endearment here. He is showing himself to be someone who is trustworthy, someone who has a vested interest in our wellbeing. “Dear friends, little children, let’s love each other, because love is from God.” Okay, we are still trying to figure out what exactly love is, but we do see here that love is something that is to be extended to others. Love demands something of me.

**SLIDE : Love demands something from me.**

Love has another person in view. And we extend love outward because love is from God. In the same way every river has a source, love flows out from God who is the source. Then we read, “Everyone who loves is born from God and knows God.” Okay so we see some more information revealed here. Love has a relational aspect to it.

**SLIDE: Love is relational.**

 John uses the term “*gennao”* which means to beget, to bring forth. So not only is love relational, but it has a familial depth to it. This God, who is love, makes people into family. We are born from God – we can not only relate to God, we are actually made into relatives!

**SLIDE: God’s love makes people into family.**

 Verse 8: “The person who doesn’t love does not know God, because God is love.” So that is sort of the same thing stated negatively. It is speaking to the relationality of love. Then John goes on to explain, “This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him.”

 So let’s take a step back for a moment. What has our beloved elder told us so far? What do we know? Love originates in God, it demands that we love others, and love has a relational/familial effect. If we love, we are born of God. But here now we are seeing God sending his only Son, who presumably is also born of God. How can God have beloved children born of him on one hand and then have only one Son on the other? That is a little confusing Well, let’s read on.

**SLIDE 12: 1 John 4:10**

Verse 10: “This is love:” Okay, wonderful, we are finally going to have it all clarified right here. “It is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.” God’s love is sacrificial.

**SLIDE: Love is sacrificial**

God’s love deals with our sin. And this Son that is sent is somehow separate, in a status all his own. You and I, the first readers of this letter, we can rightly be called sons and daughters of God, but this one and only Son, he is set apart…he is holy. He is perfect…the perfect sacrifice. God’s love is not hearts and flowers and candy…it’s precious blood and death and dust. John goes on, “Dear friends,” that is, “beloved, if God loved us this way, we ought to also love each other.” How is that again? Sacrificially? In a way that deals with sin?

**SLIDE: Love deals with sin.**

 Can’t we just talk about love? Do we really need to bring sin into this conversation? It could be such a nice topic…But we need to talk about sin, because love deals with sin. Isaiah 59:2 provides a nice summary of the affects of sin: “Your misdeeds have separated you from your God.”

**SLIDE 14: Isaiah 59:2**

That is: your iniquity, your guilt. “Your sins have hidden his face from you so that you aren’t heard.” Sin separates us from God. This truth played out when the very first sin was committed way back in the Garden of Eden. After Adm and Eve listen to the snake and they eat the fruit, they go into hiding. They do not want to face God. They would rather be away from God’s presence than face him in their sin. At the beginning I references a young boy waiting in his room as his parents discuss his fate. The kid would rather be anywhere else. He doesn’t want to face his parents after he did something wrong. Why? Because sin separates. And the fact that sin separates is such an insidious evil because the love of God is relational. The love of God means that God desires to be with us, that his presence be near to us, that there would be no interference between him and us. But sin severs that relationship.

**SLIDE 14: Monkey**

Have you ever played monkey in the middle? It’s just like catch except there are three kids instead of two. So, while two of the kids play catch with the ball the third kid runs in-between doing everything he can to intercept the ball, to disrupt the connection. So, by jumping and juking and waving and yelling, the monkey in the middle makes a game of catch extremely difficult.

**SLIDE: Sin is the monkey in the middle**

Sin is that monkey. Sin separates. It breaks off our connection, it obfuscates, it disrupts. The Isiaah verse we read tells us that sin prevents us from being heard. Our prayers are hindered because of this persistent monkey. Our passes to God cannot connect. I always disliked monkey in the middle. I was never very good at it. I do not posses a great ability to throw a ball as it is, let alone try to have to outmaneuver someone intent on stopping me. And, to be honest, I was not that impressed with the result. I was not all that willing to put a lot of effort into completing a pass. It just didn’t seem worth all the hassle. I found it easier to just do something else.

**SLIDE: Is my relationship with God worth the hassle?**

Sadly, this can become our attitude toward God. The monkey in the middle is so persistent, so good at what he does, so unavoidable, we begin to question if the end result, the completed catch is even worth it. It’s frustrating to live with a monkey in your face. It’s easier to throw in the towel, to stop playing and head home. We begin to question if our relationship with God is worth the hassle.

But we must remember “how deep the Father’s love for us. How vast beyond all measure. That he would give his only Son to make a wretch his treasure.”

God’s love deals with sin. God’s love removes this monkey that separates. God’s love restores our connection. And he did it by sending his one and only Son as a sacrifice.

**SLIDE 15: 1 John 5:3**

If we jump a bit forward to 1 John 5:3 “This is the love of God: we keep God’s commandments. God’s commandments are not difficult, because everyone who is born from God defeats the world (we could read here the monkey). And this is the victory that has defeated the world: our faith.”

Faith is our victory. When we believe in this only Son who came and died as a sacrifice that deals with our sin, we are victorious. Faith produces obedience in our life. And faith is a result of the depth of the Father’s love for us. God did not have to worry himself with our monkey problem. God could have simply shrugged off Adam and Eve in the garden. He could have said, “Fine, have it your way.” Certainly, God does not have to be mindful of you or I now. But he is because he loves us. Why does he love us? Because God is love. And he will do anything and everything to make sure our connection is clear, to make sure we can complete the pass; to make sure there is no separation.

**SLIDE 16: Romans 8**

I want to close with words from the apostle Paul found in Romans 8: “Who will separate us from Christ’s love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, in Psalm 44, ‘We are being put to death all day long for your sake. We are treated like sheep for slaughter.’ But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loves us. I’m convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Jesus Christ our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers, no height or depth, or any other thing that is created.” And I might add, not even that evil monkey that persists in the middle. The depth of the Father’s love has overcome our separation from him, and our faith is the proof of his victory! We live into that victory by growing in our faith: obeying his word, pursuing him in prayer and being ever grateful his removal of our sin that separates! Amen!

Let’s sing together praises to him now!