

First Love
Feb 14, 2010
Lamentations 3:22-23 Ephesian 1: 3-14
Rev. Carolyn McOwen

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY- FIRST LOVE

When Jeff asked me to preach on Valentine's Day, he gave me the choice to follow in his sermon series, or pick my own scripture. In the past, I have always followed along with his series. But today, if I had followed his series, I would be preaching on the beheading of John the Baptist. There are some commonalities between John the Baptist and St. Valentine. One being, they both were beheaded. Tradition says that St. Valentine was a priest in Rome during the time of Emperor Claudius II, 250 AD. Claudius thought that married soldiers were not as good as single soldiers, so he forbade any soldier to marry. But St. Valentine kept performing marriages secretly until he was caught, thrown in jail and finally beheaded. The day before he was to die, he left a note to the daughter of the prison guard, who had been very kind to him. He signed it, "**Love from your Valentine.**" He died on February 14, 269 AD.

Let us pray:

Slide 3

This Valentine morning, I want us to focus on one thing, Our First Love- the love that God had for us even before we were born. Jeremiah 31:3 states, that God loves us with an everlasting love. As we read in Lamentations 3, "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning." This is our first love- God's steadfast love that is everlasting. No matter where we are this morning, no matter what is going on in our lives, I want us all to reflect and hold on tight to this love. What did this love cost God? Say it with me, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)

It is this FIRST LOVE that motivated Paul to write the letter to Ephesians. He was in prison, focusing on the love he had for the people of Ephesus, and then thinking of the amazing love God had for him and for these people.

I want to encourage you to keep your Bibles open to Ephesians chapter 1.

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Slide 5

From **verse 1** in this first chapter, we know that Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesian church. But, in a few ancient manuscripts there is a blank space instead of the words **in Ephesus**. Based partly on this, some believe that this letter was actually a letter written not to any one group of believers, but it was meant to be passed on to many different congregations in different cities. Being so, we here at Geneva at this time, may read verse 1 like this, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in South Orange County and are faithful in Christ Jesus;”

Paul is writing this letter to all the saints, “the faithful in Christ Jesus.” Now, I hope that by now, you realize that **if** you have asked Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, you are one of the saints that Paul is writing about. The word, saint, mean “**holy one.**” **But you may be saying to yourself, “yeah, right, if you only knew what I did or if you knew my inmost thoughts.” There is no way I’m holy. I’m not included in the saint category.** Well, here is the deal, “**While you were still sinners, Jesus died for us.**” (**Romans 5:8**) For you and me. Jesus Christ fully demonstrated God’s love. How great is that love, that he gave his own beloved Son, to die for you and me. So, as your Lord and Savior, Jesus has forgiven you, washed your sins with his blood, making you holy, forgiven, and righteous in his eyes. This Wednesday, is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season, the season in which we take time to remember what Jesus did for us. It is a season of reflection and rededication. It is the season that started because of God’s unconditional love for each one of us.

So, today’s text is written for you, you are the saints of our Lord. These verses are for you.

In these verses, Paul uses

“**Us**” 6 times v. 3-10 God blessed **us** in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ, he chose **us** before the creation of the world, he predestined **us** to be adopted as his children, he freely gave **us** his glorious grace, not only gave us, but lavished upon **us**, **then** with all wisdom and understanding, he made known to **us** the **mystery of his will**.

I want to stop here. Last week, at the communion table I mentioned the storm of a 21 year old, Taylor Martin, who has struggled his whole life with a debilitating disease. I’ve been at his bedside almost daily this week. On Tuesday, at his bedside, I read this passage to three of Taylor’s close friends. We talked about the “why” of all the suffering that this

young man had gone through his whole life, with no answers. But we do see how God has used him to reflect God's glory and to spread the good news of His love and salvation to so many people. In a way, we see the mystery of his will and how Taylor's life has been used by God. We still do not have many answers to the "why" of life's pain, but we see God using it for his purpose. **This is our hope, and our strength to continue on.** Paul used the pronoun "**We**" 3 times- in him, **we** have redemption, **we** were chosen, **we**, who were the first to hope in Christ. v.11-12.

Paul used the pronoun "**You**" 4 times- **you** were included in Christ when **you** heard the word of truth, the gospel of **your** salvation. Having believed, **you** were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. V. 14 God will not let go of **you**.

Paul is pointing out in this first chapter that it is all about **God at work**. There is no demand for us to do anything, but to be included as one of the saints. Paul is talking about **what only God can do and what God alone has already done**. It is not something that God is going to do, but something he has already done. God chose us, he destined us, in him we have redemption, he has made known to us his will. And then he sealed himself to us through the Holy Spirit. God is at work!

All around the world, Christians have their feet out the door, during good things. Daily there are articles in the newspaper about people bringing aid to Haiti. Here at Geneva, "feet are out the door" is one of our initiatives, which is as it should be. We are a busy society, doing good things. I don't need to tell you how busy everyone is, how rushed our culture is.

But for us here today, right now, on Valentine's Day, I want us to slow down and simply bask in the love of God, bask in the love he had for us before we were born, and he has for us now, even in our most sinful, undeserving state. **EPHESIANS 3:18** "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. And that **NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THIS LOVE.- Romans 8:35-39**

A song that was sung at one of my daughter's weddings was Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Love Changes Everything". One line in the song is profound, "Love changes everything, how you live and how you die." While around Taylor's bed, we talked about the hope and peace, and yes, joy that there is because he has no more pain and that now he is with Jesus. We could only do this because of God's amazing love. And this love, which never changes, does change everything.

Close your eyes and think about this- What is the main issue in your life right now- It may be good or it may be bad? Is it some kind of a loss- a loss of a loved one, a broken relationship, loss of a job, loss of health. Simply loneliness. Or are things going well with you? Health good, finances stable, kids and family doing ok. Image your life without the love of God in it. You are on your own, and when all is say and done, that's it. It's over, the end. Nothing.

Now, image the fullness of God's love in your life. With this love comes every spiritual blessings, chosen as God's beloved child, redemption, forgiveness, riches of God's grace, inheritance of eternal life, and sealed by the Holy Spirit, God's guarantee that we belong to him and that he will do what he promised. There is hope, power, strength, and joy. There is life everlasting. This world isn't the end. Yes, God's Everlasting Love Changes everything. (you can open your eyes now).

As we were around Taylor's bed, everyone gave him permission to let go and to be with Jesus. I can't imagine what it would be like without the hope of God, without his love and without his promise of life everlasting.

I can't imagine what it would be like without God's love and his great faithfulness.

Before I close, I have one question? How do we fully grasp this love of God and what is our response to it. First, if you haven't done so, ask God to be Lord of your life.

Renew your relationship with him. Then make time daily to read his word. Spend time with God in Bible Study. Slow down and look for his work in your life, in creation, in the people around you. Talk with him in prayer. [In her 1997 Christmas Letter, Wilma Haines put prayer to poetry:](#)

Wilma Haines Christmas Letter 1997

To Keep in touch with almighty God, to send or to receive,
The lines are always open for those who truly believe.
It's faster than a Fax machine; it's quicker than e-mail;
He's always glad to hear from us, and sends us help when we might fail.
The answer might not suit us, for sometimes it is "NO".
And sometimes He says, "Wait a while, and in the meantime, grow."
But don't fail to communicate; don't try it on your own;
God made it very clear to all; man was not made to live alone.

Let God 's love change everything in your life. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; They are new every morning; Great is your faithfulness.

Benediction-

We have a booklet, "Seeking God in the City" available at the back which will help you to pray and embrace God's love through this Lenten season. It starts this Wed, so be sure to pick up this booklet.