

**Sermon for
The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
(Valentine's Day)**

Date: February 17, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

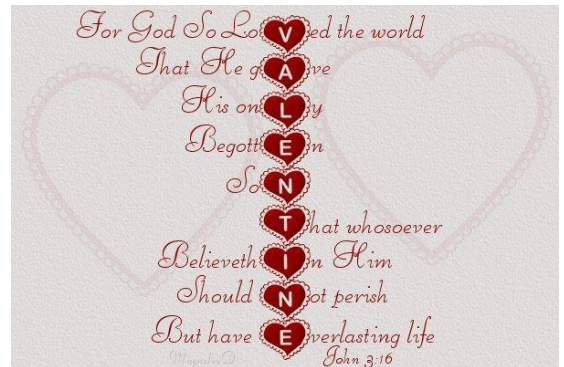
Old Testament: Jeremiah 17:5–8

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12–20

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:17–26

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12–20

Sermon Title: Love One Another, Because God Loves Us



Introit: Psalm 119:1-2,4,5; Antiphon: Psalm 119:7

Hymns:

LSB 698 – May We Your Precepts, Lord, Fulfill

LSB 501 – Come Down, O Love Divine

LSB 729 – I Am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus (v.1,6)

LSB 922 – Go, My Children, with My Blessing

Distribution:

LSB 714 – Alleluia, Sing of Gladness

LSB 725 – Children of the Heavenly Father

Liturgy:

Divine Service IV, p. 203



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Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12–20

If it is proclaimed that Christ has been raised from the dead how can some of you say that there is no resurrection from of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead then even Christ has not been raised, and if Christ hasn't come back to life our message has no meaning and your faith also has no meaning. In addition, we would obviously be witnesses who lied about God because we testified that he brought Christ back to life.

If it's true that the dead don't come back to life then God didn't bring Christ back to life. Certainly, if the dead don't come back to life, then Christ has not come back to life either, and if Christ hasn't come back to life your faith is worthless and sin still has you in its power. Then those who have died as believers in Christ are lost. If Christ is our hope in this life only we deserve more pity than any other people, but in fact Christ has come back from the dead. He is the very first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

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May God's grace and love be present in your lives always, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Happy belated Valentine's Day. Most people, at least in America, probably think Valentine's Day was invented by Hallmark® to sell more greeting cards. The truth is this holiday is so old no one really knows how old it is. There are three men named Valentine that could have been the name sake of this holiday. We honestly just don't know which one anymore. This day has become renowned as a day when men do something special for their lady.



Now it is perhaps no secret that some of us men-folk are not as chivalrous as Don Quixote, not as romantic as Cyrano de Bergerac, and will never sing or look like, Fabio Lanzoni. In fact the truth is most of the men-folk here may not even know who those people are. Yet in spite of whatever short-comings you might have in the arts these men so skillfully wield, still there is a lady who respects, honors, and trusts you.

That is the wonder of a woman's heart. That bizarre and strange thing we men will never fully understand – the heart of a woman, can find so much good in a simple, regular, average, hard working man. Which is probably one of the many reasons you love her so much. Because she knows all your weaknesses and still wants to be with you, still trusts you, still respects you.

You may at times think, "I am not worthy of this woman's love." Yet she'll continue to love you anyway. Even though you are not the hunk of Hollywood. You take each other as you are and would have have no other. Who could replace the one with whom you now share your life?

In today's Bible readings we see another relationship that is even more difficult to understand. A relationship that is almost entirely one sided. A relationship where one side gives everything and the other only receives. Mostly because the one who receives has nothing to give. The One who gives is God and the one who receives is us. God has given us everything. What do we have to give back to God that He wants or needs?

God has created everything. He created you. He created the whole Universe. What is it exactly that you think you could offer Him that He does not have. Talk about trying to buy the gift for the One who has everything. God really does have everything – I mean EVERYTHING! Why does He spend His time on us? We ignore Him. We are at times ashamed to admit we know Him. We don't talk to Him for days, or weeks at a time. We may not even think to give Him a gift as a token of our appreciation for all He has to put up with because of us.

Too often we take God for granted. We take what He has done for us for granted. We even take the privilege of being given access to the very throne of God for granted. If ever there were a case of unrequited love it must be between us and God. God has given us so much and we often give nothing in return. He went so far as to give His own Son's life for us, and we too often take no notice. God has told us we can trust Him and rely on Him but we choose to rely on our own strength instead.

Our Old Testament reading speaks to this very point. It says:

Cursed is the one who trusts man, who makes flesh and blood his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wilderness. He will not see when something good comes. He will live in the dry places in the desert, in a salty land where no one can live.

God offers us so much and we too often choose to toss it away and say, "Don't bother. I don't need You. I don't need or want anything You would give me." Because we reject God's love we suffer. We are like a bush in the wilderness¹ that is dried and alone. God offers us so much and we become so blinded by: relying upon ourselves, and by the trials this world throws in our way that we do not see what He has to offer. We cannot see the good when it does come to us.

Our epistle reading for today makes the point even more clearly. Paul here reminds us that we have been given the Gospel² – the Good News – that God has saved us. We have been given eternal life in Him because He, in spite of all we have done to Him, still loves us so much that He gave His only Son to die for us.³ Paul, when he wrote to the churches in Corinth, was dealing with some people who said, "Jesus was a good teacher but He did not rise from the dead. No one can come back to life. Once they are dead." Paul says if that is true then we have nothing to rely upon at all. Listen to Paul's words:

If it is proclaimed that Christ has been raised from the dead how can some of you say that there is no resurrection from of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead then even Christ has not been raised, and if Christ hasn't come back to life our message has no meaning and your faith also has no meaning.

These people in Corinth were given the most wonderful and precious gift. Far, far, more than precious gems or jewelry; far more than flowers in a delicate vase; far more than a quiet meal at their favorite restaurant. They were given their lives because the One who loved them was willing to die for them. The One who loved them gave His life to protect them and they said, "He couldn't have done all of that." They took the single most precious and perfect gift anyone could give and just tossed it aside like it was worth no more than the box in which it was wrapped.

1 Jeremiah 48:6

2 Gospel is a Greek word that means "Good News."

3 John 3:16-17

Maybe too often we are too much like them. Although we may not think Jesus could have never done such things for us we do not give Him the appreciation and respect He is due. We might have enough manners to say, "Thanks." Then we go out and buy ourselves something else. Was His gift not enough? What more could He have given? What more could we want? Still He loves us anyway.

You know the Bible often uses the love between a man and a woman to describe God's relationship with us. There are the examples like the book of Hosea where God says we are His bride but we sell ourselves to everyone like prostitutes and break His heart. Then there are those other examples, the good examples. The ones we see in our own everyday lives and probably miss. Guys have you ever noticed that your lady will love you no matter how often you mess up. If you really apologize, not just with shallow words but from your heart, she almost can't help but forgive you. Isn't that a picture of God's heart. Hasn't God told us, 'Just apologize from the heart and I will forgive you.'

Lady's have you noticed that your man will be strong for you even if you are not the gracious, graceful, super-model on TV; that your man takes you as you are and provides for you and protects you. Isn't that a picture of God's heart. In spite of our being less than the perfection He desires He still loves us.

There is a reason why God uses the relationship between a man and a woman to describe His relationship with us. It is because the two kinds of love: the strength and resilience of a man, and the almost endless forgiveness of a woman, are together the example of how God has, does, and will forever, love us.

We are now in a relationship with God that includes many struggles. There are trials, rough roads and challenges. Our lives right now might best be understood in our culture as an engagement. We have a promise between us. A promise of a new relationship that will never be broken, but we need to spend some time getting to know each other first. We are not living together and we are not yet in that marriage with that total connection with God.

We are waiting. Waiting for the wedding. Which is exactly how God describes it. The Last Day, Judgment Day, is not a day we need to worry about. For those who believe that is the day described throughout God's love letter to us – Holy Scripture – as the great wedding feast of the Lamb, or the great wedding banquet. It is a great celebration when we will move into God's house and live there forever with Him. It is that moment in time when we leave all the troubles that come with being separated from God behind us.

That is what Jesus is talking about in our Gospel lesson. Listen to His words:

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are poor. God's kingdom is theirs. Blessed are those who are hungry. They will be satisfied. Blessed are those who are crying. They will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, avoid you, insult you and slander you because you are committed to the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! You have a great reward in heaven."

The world laughs at those who wait. Whether it's waiting until marriage or waiting on God. The world makes fun of those who believe God's Word and know He will claim us as His own. The world mocks us for loving and respecting the One who cares for us. Jesus says, "Let them laugh."⁴



Don Quixote



Cyrano de
Bergerac



Fabio Lanzoni

Men let me ask you a question. If you heard a man laughing at, and demeaning, your wife; if you heard someone say, about your lady, that she is less than anyone would want, how would that make you feel? I bet it would get you more than a little riled up. I bet it would make you want to rise to her rescue. Just like Don Quixote would have. Then don't you go home and tell her how much you cherish her and love her, just the way Cyrano de Bergerac would have? Isn't it amazing how she will look at you with eyes that see her Fabio.

God has come to our rescue. We can trust in Him, in His strength, in His protection. The world is doing more than just laughing at us. It is threatening to kill us. God stood up. He came to our defense and in the battle for our lives He died so that we could live. Even though we are, and have always been, far less that He desired.

The thing that is so amazing about God is that we, as we are, are all He desires. He wants nothing else except our love and respect. That is the only thing we have that He wants or needs, and it costs us nothing.

Today as you remember to show that little bit of extra outward display of affection toward each other also remember that your love is an example of God's love. An example for you and to those whom you love.

In the name of our Savior who loves us Jesus our Lord.

Amen.