

Year B, March 11, 2018
4 Lent
Christ Church, Mexia

Loving God, you have given us the most precious gift of love; help us to overcome our humanity, that we may be more like you. AMEN.

A husband and wife were getting snugly in bed and passion was building, when the wife stops and says, "I don't feel like it, I just want you to hold me." The husband blurts out, "What?" The wife explains that he must not be in tune with her emotional needs as a woman – and they go to sleep.

The next day the husband takes his wife shopping at a large department store. He has her try on three very expensive dresses, but she can't decide which one she likes best. He tells his wife to take all three. Then they go to pick out matching shoes at about \$200 a pair. And then they go to the jewelry department where she gets a set of diamond earrings. The wife is so excited; she thinks her husband has lost his mind, but she doesn't care.

She begins to examine the tennis bracelet. The husband says, "You don't even play tennis ... but OK, if you like it let's get it." The wife is now jumping up and down; she's so excited she can't believe this is happening. Then she suggests that they stop shopping and go pay for the items she has accumulated. They begin to walk, but the husband stops and says, "No, darling, I don't feel like buying all this stuff now." The wife's face goes blank. "I just want you to hold this stuff for a while," continues the husband. The look on her face is indescribable and she looks about ready to explode, when the husband concludes, "You must not be in tune with my financial needs as a man."

It makes an amusing story, but on the other hand it is so sad because it is very descriptive of human love in many cases. We want things, we expect things, and if we don't get them, we get even.

According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "human love, by its very nature, is desire – ... But where it can no longer expect its desire to be fulfilled, there it stops short – namely, in the face of an enemy. There it turns into hatred, contempt, and calumny." This assertion is demonstrated fairly well by the story.

So human love is egocentric, - centered usually on the giver. It is driven by urges and desires. It is concerned with power, - control and domination, - MY will be done. Undoubtedly, these motivations vary depending upon the personalities of those involved in the relationship; by communication, or lack thereof, between them; and by other things as well.

Macartney's Illustrations contains a story about Thomas Carlyle that makes another point. Carlyle had married his secretary, whom he dearly loved, ...but he was thoughtless and absorbed in his own interest and activities, treating his wife mostly as if she were still his employee.

Sadly after a few years, she was stricken with cancer and was confined to bed for a long time before she died. After her funeral, Carlyle went back to the empty house. Disconsolate and grieving, he wandered around downstairs thinking about the woman he had loved. After a while he went upstairs to her room and sat in the chair beside her bed on which she had been lying for many months. He realized with painful regret that he had not sat there very often during her long illness. Then he noticed her diary. While she was alive, he never would have read it, but now that she was gone he felt free to pick it up and thumb through its pages. One entry caught his eye: "Yesterday he spent an hour with me. And it was like being in heaven. I love him so much." He turned a few more pages and read, "I listened all day to hear his footsteps in the hallway. And now it's late. I guess he won't come to see me." Carlyle read several more entries and then threw the book on the floor and rushed out of the house, through the rain, to the cemetery. He fell on his wife's grave in the mud, sobbing, "If only I had known... if only I had known."

"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." Can it be any clearer than that? Is there anyone of us who can say, I wish I had known? But does it make a difference in our lives?

God didn't do this because we (humankind) deserved it; in fact, he did it because we didn't deserve it. We had turned away from God; we had flaunted our independence time and again. We were so far from grace, that we needed a savior - a model and a sacrifice to clear the way for relationship with God.

God's love does not desire, but serves - gives. It loves an enemy as it does a brother. It is focused on the highest good, not rules of conduct

and expectations. It is not based upon self, but on the other. It does not focus on complaints, but rather on gratitude. It is not about human desire or urges, but rather spiritual change and growth – becoming better – loving more.

This fourth Sunday in Lent is known in some circles as Laetare (lay-TAH-ray) Sunday – the Latin word for rejoice. But the message “For God so loved the world...” has become almost cliché in our world, we see it on billboards and bumper stickers and other places, or at least in the form “John 3:16.” And therefore, it has lost some of its significance. Isn’t it time to rejoice that God loves us so much? It’s well known, but isn’t it time that we truly understand and accept what those words mean for us? Isn’t it time that we really, really, try to imitate God’s love as shown in the life of Jesus? ...to love God and each other in the way that God loves us? If Jesus was truly fully human, as we believe he was, then we can love like this – because he did.

None of us knows when our final day on this earth will come. Let’s not arrive at the gate to the Kingdom of Heaven saying feebly, “If only I had known... if only I had known.”

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.