

**“Jesus loves me, this I know”** - Conley – 1/28/18 - Rick Leissner  
Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (NIV) / 1 John 4:7-21 (NIV)

Karl Barth, often regarded as the greatest Reformed theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was once asked to sum up Christianity. He famously answered, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." This is title of a simple song, often sung at baptism or by children – but this title has a fundamental and powerful message to us as Christians. Think about it – “Jesus loves me” .....this I know” .....”for the Bible tells me so’. Wow.

This morning I want to talk about **love**. But **NOT** the overused, watered down worldly word “love”, which we use in statements like – “I love pizza”, “I love that show”, “I love this dress”, or an adolescent girl looking all ‘googly eyed’ & saying “I think I’m in love with that boy” – *that she just met !*

**Agape** love is not just a mere feeling – it is a **choice & an action**. When we think of what the **Bible** says about love, we usually think about the two Great Commandments, or the beautiful love passage in 1st Corinthians 13, read at so many weddings. ‘Love’ is used **538** times in the NRSV Bible, so we can safely conclude God wants us to know love is very, very important.

Some years ago, a group of PCUSA bible scholars wanted to determine which Bible author did the best job of teaching about loving others. So, of course, they formed a committee! They considered David, thought about Paul, & considered John, but then they picked Peter – after all, **he** even prayed for Jesus to heal his **mother-in-law** !

But seriously, God’s unconditional love is a major foundation of Christianity! God loves us as we are. God’s love is free. We can never fully comprehend the depth of God's love, but we **can** experience it, cherish it, and celebrate it.

Today’s New Testament reading gives us many rich insights into the true nature of agape love. It also refers to Jesus and His role in salvation, as well as the indwelling Holy Spirit. There are many types of literature and styles of writing in the bible – historical, poetic, wisdom, storytelling, and theological – but this is one that it is absolutely chock full of important content & can greatly increase our understanding of this highest of all virtues. Let’s look at some of the insights we can draw from this wonderful passage by John.

**Love is from God.** One could argue that God **created** us to love us. Certainly, love is a gift & a blessing from God. And His love is unconditional – God loves us all the time, thru the good & the bad, despite our failings & sinfulness. That is cause to rejoice!

**God is love.** Have you ever tried to describe God? You probably came up with terms like sovereign, infinite, all knowing, almighty, ever living, triune. There is nothing wrong with those descriptions, but today's reading tells us **GOD IS LOVE.** For me, it's hard to beat that simple 3 word description.

**God revealed His love by sending His Son to us that we might live.** This is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. God loved us so much, He sent His only begotten Son to earth to experience what it is to be human, and die for our sins – the greatest...gift...ever. This unimaginable gift also gives us a valuable insight into love - real love involves **action**. It is not enough to SAY we love someone, we must show it by our actions, which God did - big time. It is like James tells us - "Faith without works is dead".

**God abides in us & we abide in Him, because He gave us His Spirit.** God sent the Holy Spirit to  **dwell in us**  – to guide us, inspire us, help us understand God's Word, & give us special gifts & His Fruit. We will talk more about that next week.

**There is no fear in perfect love.** Only God's love is perfect. But consider this - by the work of Jesus, we are forgiven, escape God's wrath, & are given eternal life. This is God's promise in the new & everlasting covenant. **Removal of the fear of punishment is a major feature of God's love.** Knowing this, our love helps overcome our fear. As Paul writes in Romans 8, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

**We love because God first loved us.** The love God showers on us enables us to love in return. After all, God created us – gave us dominion over the earth – made us His children – and gave us eternal life through Jesus Christ. God's love set us free, because after The Fall, human nature was enslaved to sin. As Christians, we are born again & given some of God's nature. God's nature is full of love, & we are created in His image so it follows that we should also love – but we still need God's love first before we can show love ourselves!

**Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.** My friends, love is a **choice**, but after all God has given us & done for us, the

**only** appropriate response is to return that love. We honor & glorify God by loving our neighbor. And when you think about it, what **better** way to **SHOW** our love for God than to show our love to others?

But OK, let's face it, this one is hard – it is not easy to love everyone. We have all come across some folks that are not very lovable - or even likable for that matter. Am I right?

But let me tell you something – it has been a blessing getting to know each of you here at Conley. Love is alive & well here, & I feel God's presence with us. You are each a beautiful child of God. Clearly, God loves You, & is using you as channels of His love.

I think most of us remember Art Linkletter's "Kids Say the Darndest Things", right? Well, sometimes what kids say is profound and heartwarming too. Enjoy how these 4-8 year olds defined love - - -

Love is when you share your French Fries with someone and don't ask for anything in return – Brad - 8

"When my grandma got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandpa does it for her now, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love." - Rebecca - 8

"When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth." - Billy - 4

"If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate." - Nikka - 6

"During my piano recital, I was on a stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people watching me and saw my daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that. I wasn't scared anymore." - Cindy – 8

"Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken." - Elaine - 5

"You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget." - Jessica – 8

"Love is when Mommy sees Daddy is smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsome." – Chris – 7

Once, a guy named Leo Buscaglia judged a contest to find the most loving child. The winner was a 4 year old child boy, whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had just lost his wife. The little boy went over to the old gentleman, climbed onto his lap, and seemed to just sit there. Later, his Mom asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "*Nothing*, I just helped him cry."

And finally, in his book "Mere Christianity", renown Christian author C.S. Lewis offers this suggestion regarding loving each other....

"Don't waste your time worrying whether you 'love' your neighbor - just act like you do. When we do, we find one of life's great secrets. When you behave as if you love someone, you will actually come to love them. If you injure someone you dislike, you find yourself disliking them more. But if you do them a good turn, you find yourself disliking them less."

This is a principle also known as the "*self-fulfilling prophecy*". Let's give that a try !

***Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.***

Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen