

“Survey Said: Showing the Love”

James 1:17-27; John 13:34-35

How many of you have heard of a TV show named “Family Feud?” Have you seen it RECENTLY? *I’m sorry...* and let me tell you why... It started back in **1976**, as a spinoff from the very popular show “The Match Game”... and was hosted by Richard Dawson, who had also been a long-time regular on its ‘parent show.’ ‘Back in the day’ it bore witness to its name because you could actually watch it with your whole ‘FAMILY’; not so much now, where host Steve Harvey makes the most of the oft-times suggestive, off-color questions and answers. NOT something you’d want to have young children in the room to watch with you...

The premise, however, IS an entertaining one. They survey a group of people... not really sure just from WHERE... on different questions, and the contestants have to predict the most popular answers. Each player’s response is ‘answered’ with the preface, **“Survey Said...”** And the team who gets the most correct responses wins.

Today we begin our own version of this game of ‘Q & A.’ Many of you responded to my request for sermon topics. Some with one-word recommendations, and others with MUCH more ‘involved’ descriptions to be considered. ☺ Each week between now and Advent we will consider one of those suggestions. And so, for our first week of ‘CHURCH Family Feud’... **‘Survey Said: Showing the Love.’**

Just to clarify what TODAY’s ‘survey’ topic entailed, the person who submitted this sermon idea wanted to explore just how WE, who have been shown great love from God (whether we *realize* it or not!), **in turn** bear witness to that love to one another. **Do we treat others as we want to be treated?** Perhaps relative to how we would want to be welcomed if visiting a new church. (Which I found *pleasingly* insightful! We should ALWAYS be striving to see our own church through the eyes of a visitor...) **How did Jesus show his concern for others, and encourage them to ‘pass it on?’** Each one of us, whether we admit it or not, wants to feel loved... especially by the very Author of love. The question is, **how good are WE at ‘Showing the Love’ for one another**, learning by examples from Scripture, and from real life?

First of all, we are to 'show the love' to one another because GOD SAID SO! Way back in Deuteronomy, God said to love your neighbor as yourself. So why is this, according to Jesus, a 'new' commandment? Because it's not simply in some self-esteem or self-care sense of love... like you love yourself... but to love others **"As I (Jesus) have loved you."** Let's face it... sometimes we don't always 'love ourselves' too well... especially when we do 'unlovable' things. But JESUS' love? It is unparalleled... unqualified. Without question, or condition. When our Lord says **"love one another as I have loved you,"** that's NOT to be taken lightly... for His love came at great cost... that of His life!

But we're not Jesus, right? How can WE exhibit such unconditional love... a love that does not hold grudges, take sides, dictate conditions? Not easily. We need help. From above. In the words of James, **"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change [of turning]."**

'We love because God first loved us!' Our ability to LOVE... which IS **'a generous act of giving'**... love, which is a **'perfect gift'**... is **'from above, coming down from the Father.'** A Father God **'with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.'** (Jas 1:17) This last phrase is also translated, **'there is no shadow of turning.'** Sound familiar? As in a great hymn of the church? **"Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with Thee."** God demonstrated His faithful love for us by sending 'Love come down' from heaven, Jesus Christ. We need to pray that God continue to send that same type of love 'down into our hearts.' ('Down in our hearts to stay!')

But aside from our sense of **obligation** to love one another because Jesus TOLD us to... in addition to our **dependence** on GOD to inspire us to love, especially those who are pretty hard to do so... we must very much be concerned with how our actions toward one another either **confirms** our **Christian witness**... or **denies** it. If we profess to be followers of the One True God in Jesus Christ, does what we do and say to others serve as 'evidence' to 'convict' us of the 'charge' of 'committing Christianity?'

James issues the charge that we all should take seriously: **"Be DOERS of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves."** (James 1:22) Now, just what does it mean to be

a 'doer' of the word? Is it all about what 'good deeds' we do... even if the purpose is to please God? Will our 'good deeds' guarantee us a place at the Table at the *Heavenly* banquet? The Apostle Paul was pretty clear: ***"For it is by (GOD's) grace you have been saved, through faith... NOT by works, lest anyone should boast."*** (Eph. 2:8-9) AND YET, it is those deeds that are to bear witness to our faith... words that are 'grace-full'... 'full of grace.'

It is just that 'grace-ful' nature that caused to James say to his friends, ***"You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness."*** (James 1:19-20) And further, with regards to that 'righteousness of God' that we are to have, ***"if any think they are 'religious,' and do not bridle their tongues, but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless."*** (James 1:26)

Now, as I have said before, I struggle with that word 'religion.' I consider 'religion' to be a 'man-made construct'... too much about *rules* and not enough about *relationship*. I'm not sure I'd want to be called 'religious'... I'd MUCH rather be called 'faithful.' In the words of one of my favorite songs by Steven Curtis Chapman, *"Oh may all that come behind us find us faithful."* So, if it would be OK with James ☺, I would modify this passage: 'If any think that they are **Christian**, and do not bridle their tongues, but deceive their hearts, their **Christian faith** is worthless.' And I don't know about you, but this sure hits home for ME! I have to ask myself, am I 'quick to listen?' 'Slow to speak?' 'Slow to anger?' Particularly when I am with someone who says something that I 'KNOW' is not right?! ☺ And I just HAVE to 'set them straight?' What if it's about politics, or the economy, or social issues... or maybe something *really* important, like someone who is sitting in our spot in the pew, or likes a different kind of church music than we do? OK, I'm kidding... well, maybe a little...

My point is that our words... or lack of same... and our actions... or lack of same... go a LONG way in communicating the TRUTH of what we believe. In words of the One who IS 'the way, the TRUTH, and the life,' ***"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, IF you have love for one another."*** (John 13:35) WE show God's love by what we SAY and by what we DO...

As I pondered just what it means to be 'showing the love' for one another...Indeed, in the very middle of my 'pondering' for today's message... I took time out to watch the Service

for Senator John McCain at the **National Cathedral**. And when I say 'time out,' I really mean it. Basically ALL of Saturday morning.

But for me it was time well spent. Having had the opportunity to tour that magnificent **place of worship**, seeing it again was very powerful for Barrie and me. The **music**, from the opening Navy hymn, to the Battle Hymn of the Republic, to Danny Boy, was simply beautiful, and moving. In fact, it was that last song that, as far as I could see, was the only part to bring his widow Cindy to tears. The **Scriptures**, the **liturgy**, and the **prayers** ALL truly bore witness to the Resurrection hope that should carry us all through our life's journey. And the **tributes...** from his daughter Megan, to Presidents Bush and Obama, to Henry Kissinger, to fmr. Sen. Joe Lieberman... all pointed to what a true 'public servant' to our nation Sen. McCain was. One might not agree with his **politics**, but no one could doubt his **patriotism**, and his **character**. And for me, my favorite may just have been Lieberman... a good Jewish Democrat from Conn. who had such a close personal relationship with this Protestant Republican from Arizona. One of my favorite comments by him was his amusing thought he had that McCain was laughing from heaven at Lieberman's presence at the service... because being a very devout Jew, he couldn't drive a car on Saturday, the Sabbath, and had to WALK to the Cathedral...

But what that service did was to lift up not only the quality traits of a man, but the Godly principles this country was founded upon. In a time of great division, it was, in Lieberman's words, **"a much-needed moment of unity."** A time to affirm what McCain once declared to his colleagues: **"we are better than this."** A time not to be 'red or blue' (in the face), not black or white, not gay or straight, but a time to be, in the words of our closing hymn, *"one in the Spirit of the Lord."* For me, it was much more than celebrating one single human life... but rather, the "One Solitary Life" of Jesus Christ, who is THE example of how we are to 'love one another' ... as HE loves us.

In considering some of the words used to praise Senator McCain, I would apply them instead to the TRUE SOURCE from whom all of his blessings flowed... Father, Son, and Spirit. How Mr. McCain truly served to be a 'doer of the word,' and bore witness to a 'religion' that was certainly NOT 'worthless'... to him, his family, his country. Even this morning, one of the major networks had a piece on yesterday's service in which the reporter closed with the

statement that Sen. McCain's FAITH is what had sustained him, particularly during his time of captivity. Here are some comments that I picked up on that should be most associated NOT merely with the 'son of an admiral,' but the 'Son of God' ... someone who...

"Served a cause bigger than self."

"Been to hell and back... but remain unchanged."

"Had a powerful sense of Service. Duty. And was prepared to die."

And the Scripture read by his friend and colleague, Sen. Lindsey Graham: ***"Greater love hath no one than this, than to lay down one's life for one's friends."*** (John 15:13)

As you and I seek to show ourselves to be Christ's disciples, demonstrating the love that He showed for us, may we too know that we are 'serving a cause bigger than ourselves'... serving the One who truly went to 'hell and back' for us... Living by his example to 'lay down our life for our friends.' Every day, let us be mindful of how WE, in our own individual, faithful ways, are ... **Showing the Love...**

CHARGE:

There was another quote that really stuck out for me yesterday. It was in the comments made by Megan McCain, though she didn't mention its author. In researching it, I determined it was written by Pericles, a 5th Century B.C. Athenian politician. (What do you know... some *good* things actually CAN come from 'politicians!') He wrote that **"The image of great men is not only engraved on stones on earth, but woven into the fabric of others' lives."** Know that it is your mission to take the 'image of the great man' engraved on your heart... Jesus Christ... and go out and help 'weave' Him into the 'fabric' of other people's lives. And the good news is... that you don't do it alone! That the Spirit of the living God...