



A SERMON BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM R. FLEMING
MARINERS' CHURCH OF DETROIT
MAY 29, 2016

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

O GOD OF LOVE, WE PRAY THEE TO GIVE US LOVE:
LOVE IN OUR THINKING, LOVE IN OUR SPEAKING,
LOVE IN OUR DOING, AND LOVE IN THE HIDDEN PLACES OF OUR SOULS;
LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOURS NEAR AND FAR;
LOVE OF OUR FRIENDS, OLD AND NEW;
LOVE OF THOSE WITH WHOM WE FIND IT HARD TO BEAR,
AND LOVE OF THOSE WHO FIND IT HARD TO BEAR WITH US;
LOVE OF THOSE WITH WHOM WE WORK,
AND LOVE OF THOSE WITH WHOM WE TAKE OUR EASE;
LOVE IN JOY, LOVE IN SORROW;
LOVE IN LIFE AND LOVE IN DEATH;
THAT SO AT LENGTH WE MAY BE WORTHY TO DWELL WITH THEE,
WHO ART ETERNAL LOVE.

WILLIAM TEMPLE 1881-1944

FROM THE EPISTLE: I JOHN 4:7

“BELOVED, LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER FOR LOVE IS OF ONE GOD AND EVERY ONE THAT LOVETH IS BORN OF GOD AND KNOWETH GOD.”

“WE CALL YOU FATHER AND YOUR CARE FOR US IS MOTHERLY AS WELL; PROTECT OUR POWER TO LOVE AND BE LOVED. AND MAKE US GLAD TO BE CALLED YOUR CHILDREN, ONE TOGETHER IN CHRIST.”

I THINK THAT LOVE IS THE ONLY POWER THAT CAN OVERCOME THE SELF-CENTEREDNESS THAT IS INHERENT IN BEING ALIVE. LOVE IS THE POWER THAT MAKES LIFE POSSIBLE.

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK *“THE HEALING POWER OF CHRIST”*:

“WE HEAR THE WORDS ‘THE LOVE OF GOD’ SO OFTEN WITHOUT REALLY KNOWING WHAT THEY MEAN, THAT THIS PHRASE HAS BECOME FOR MANY OF US MERELY A PIOUS CLICHÉ. IT WAS SO WITH ME LONG AFTER I HAD BECOME A CHRISTIAN, UNTIL THAT NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN DAY WHEN I FIRST EXPERIENCED THE SUPERNATURAL LOVE OF GOD, AS I LAID HANDS ON A DYING MAN SUFFERING FROM A CRITICAL HEART AILMENT. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE HEALING PRAYER THERE WAS SUCH AN AWARENESS OF THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AND HIS OVERWHELMING LOVE THAT I MUST STOP AND THEN CARRY ON THE VOCAL PRAYER. HIS LOVE FLOODED THE ROOM. AFTER KNEELING BY THE SICK MAN’S BED, HE TURNED TO ME WITH A LOOK OF EXTRAORDINARY RADIANCE AND SAID, ‘TODAY I HAVE KNOWN GOD.’ AND SO HAD I.”

SOMETIMES THE REALITY OF THE LOVE OF GOD COMES TO US DURING PRAYER AS A SUDDEN REVELATION, BUT MOST OFTEN IT IS A GRADUAL PROCESS, A SLOW AND SOMETIMES PAINFUL OPENING OF OUR HEARTS AND UNDERSTANDING BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHO, IF WE WILL ONLY PERMIT HIM, STANDS READY TO LEAD US UNERRINGLY INTO ALL TRUTH-THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE KINGDOM DISCLOSED BY JESUS. WE ARE FAR FROM UNDERSTANDING HOW, BUT WE KNOW A LITTLE OF WHAT IS NECESSARY ON OUR PART IF WE ARE TO EXPERIENCE GOD. ONE THING OF WHICH WE ARE SURE IS THAT IF WE LOVE GOD ONLY WHEN THINGS GO WELL, ONLY FOR THE MATERIAL HAPPINESS HE HAS GIVEN US, ONLY FOR THE HEALING HE PROFFERS US IN THE NAME OF JESUS. AT TIMES WE ARE NOT REALLY LOVING GOD AT ALL; WE ARE LOVING ONLY HIS GIFTS. WE TRULY LOVE GOD ONLY WHEN WE CAN SAY WITH SAINT IGNATIUS, ‘GIVE ME ONLY THY LOVE AND THY GRACE. WITH THEE I AM RICH ENOUGH NOR DO I ASK FOR ANYTHING ELSE.’

*JEREMIAH 31:3 “I HAVE LOVED YOU WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE,
THEREFORE I CONTINUE MY FAITHFULNESS TO YOU.”*

“THE BIBLICAL TEXT FROM ST. PAUL’S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT CORINTH IS ONE OF THE MOST PROFOUND IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE. NOT JUST BECAUSE IT EXPLAINS LOVE BETTER THAN ANYONE OR ANYWHERE ELSE, BUT ALSO BECAUSE IT EXPRESSES THE KIND OF LOVE WE ENVISION FOR GOD, YOU, AND ME. LISTEN AGAIN PLEASE TO JUST A FEW OF THE WORDS FROM THIS PASSAGE: “LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND, LOVE IS NOT ENVIOUS OR ARROGANT OR RUDE. IT DOES NOT INSIST ON ITS OWN WAY. IT IS NOT IRRITABLE OR RESENTFUL, IT DOES NOT REJOICE IN WRONG DOING, BUT REJOICES IN THE TRUTH. IT BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS. LOVE NEVER ENDS.”

RESEARCH SAYS: “LOVE IS A STRONG AFFECTION OR ATTACHMENT OR DEVOTION TO A PERSON OR PERSONS.” THEOLOGIAN PUT IT THIS WAY:

1. GOD’S BENEVOLENT CONCERN FOR MANKIND IS DEEP.
2. MAN’S DEVOUT ATTENTION TO THE LOVE OF GOD AND GOD’S LOVE FOR US.
3. THE FEELING OF LOVE PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE FOR OTHERS.
4. TO BEGIN TO LOVE IS TO FEEL A STRONG PASSIONATE AFFECTION.

LOVE HAS ITS ORIGIN IN GOD. IT IS FROM THE GOD WHO IS LOVE THAT ALL LOVE TAKES ITS SOURCE. HUMAN LOVE IS A REFLECTION OF SOMETHING IN THE DIVINE NATURE ITSELF. WE ARE NEVER NEARER TO GOD THAN WHEN WE LOVE. LOVE HAS A DOUBLE RELATIONSHIP TO GOD: 1) ONLY BY KNOWING GOD WELL, DO WE LEARN TO LOVE. 2) LOVE COMES FROM GOD AND LOVE LEADS TO GOD.

IF GOD LOVES US, WE ARE BOUND TO LOVE EACH OTHER. THE ONLY TRUE WAY TO PROVE THAT GOD IS WITHIN OUR HEARTS IS TO CONSTANTLY SHOW OUR LOVE FOR

OTHERS WITHIN OUR LIVES. HUMAN LOVE IS A RESPONSE TO DIVINE LOVE. WE LOVE OTHERS AND OURSELVES BECAUSE CHRIST LOVES US. HIS LOVE IS THE CATALYST WHICH AWAKENS IN US THE DESIRE TO LOVE HIM AND TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS AND THOSE CLOSE TO US AS HE LOVES THEM AS WELL!!

ARCHBISHOP TUTU HAS SEVERAL VERY REAL COMMENTS ON LOVE (A COMBINATION OF THE LOVE OF GOD AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS):

1. IF WE HAVE LOVED WELL WHILE WE WERE ALIVE, THERE IS LIFE AFTER DEATH. OUR LOVE WILL ALWAYS BE ACTIVE.
2. I LOVE TO BE LOVED.
3. NOTHING IS TOO MUCH TROUBLE FOR LOVE.
4. WE CAN LOVE OTHERS WITH THEIR FAILURES WHEN WE STOP DISLIKING OURSELVES BECAUSE OF OUR FAILURES.

TUTU EXPRESSES HIS BELIEF ON WHAT LOVE INVOLVES: WHOLESOMENESS; FULLNESS OF LIFE; GOODNESS; LAUGHTER; JOY; COMPASSION; SHARING; FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE CAN BE SUMMED UP WITH ONE THOUGHT. LOVE. CHRISTIAN LOVE, CHRIST'S LOVE, IS SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST WORDS OR FEELINGS. WE CAN MEASURE THE REALITY OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD BY OUR DETERMINATION TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE AND LOVE OUR FELLOW MAN.

HEAR THE WORDS FROM THE 11:00 AM RECESSIONAL HYMN:

1. GOD IS LOVE LET HEAVEN ADORE HIM.
2. GOD IS LOVE LET EARTH REJOICE.
3. HE WHO BREATHES THRU ALL CREATION. HE IS LOVE, ETERNAL LOVE.
4. GOD IS LOVE AND HE ENFOLDS ALL THE WORLD IN ONE EMBRACE.

5. GOD IS LOVE; AND THOUGH WITH BLINDNESS, SIN AFFECTS THE SOULS OF MEN; GOD'S ETERNAL LOVING KINDNESS HOLDS AND GUIDES THEM EVEN THEN.
6. GOD IS LOVE, SO LOVE FOREVER O'ER THE UNIVERSE MUST REIGN.

WE HAVE SHARED GOD'S LOVE AND THE LOVE OF NEIGHBORS BUT WE MUST NOT FORGET LOVE OF SELF. LOVE OF SELF IS NOT POMPOUS, IT IS NOT VAIN, IT IS NOT WITH ALL THE ANSWERS. IT IS SIMPLE, BUT PROFOUNDLY BELIEVING THAT LOVE OF SELF IS NOT JUST OK, IT IS CRITICAL TO OUR LIVES. WE CANNOT LOVE GOD WITHOUT KNOWING THAT YOU AND I ARE WORTHWHILE. GOD, THE CHRIST AND THE HOLY GHOST BELIEVE THAT ALL OF US ARE VALUABLE CHILDREN OF GOD.

LET ME SHARE THESE THOUGHTS FROM THE BOOK "*COURAGE TO CHANGE*":

1. I LOVE MYSELF ENOUGH TO TRY TO HEAL MY FAILURES.
2. I CAN CALL FOR HELP FROM THOSE WHO WERE MY ENEMIES.
3. I AM WORTHY OF LOVE AND RESPECT.
4. THERE IS ALWAYS ENOUGH OF GOD TO GO AROUND.
5. I MUST RECOGNIZE THE LOVE THAT ALWAYS EXISTS IN MY LIFE.
6. WHEN I OFFER UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, IT EVENTUALLY COMES BACK IN MULTIPLES.
7. WE MAY DISCOVER THAT ALL THE LOVE AND SUPPORT WE NEED IS ALREADY AT OUR FINGERTIPS.

AN ANONYMOUS WRITER SAID: " IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE COMPASSION WITHOUT LOVE. AND IT IS POSSIBLE TO MAKE OUR LOVE TO BE UNKIND AND WITHOUT A COMPANION. FOR LOVE ITSELF IS NOT JUST AN ACCESSORY, LOVE IS THE COMPLETE PACKAGE THAT HAS ALL ELSE BUILT INTO IT, SO THAT LOVE IS A WAY OF LIFE. SOME MAY SAY GOD IS NOT ABSOLUTELY PERFECT; BUT HIS LOVE STANDS FOR HIS ENFOLDING ALL OF THE WORLD IN ONE EMBRACE.