How Deep Is Your Love?

Ann Burnham, Certified Lay Minister February 16, 2020

A belated Happy Valentine's Day to all of you – I say that because Valentine's Day is not just for lovers but for all who love, and I truly love you, my congregation – my church family.

A little bit about St. Valentine. Born in 226, in a tiny city called Terni in Umbria, Italy, he was either a priest or bishop during the reign of Claudius Gothicus, who only reigned for a little over a year. Now Rome at this point, was a cesspool of immoral behavior and one of the great witnesses of the early church is that they stood up for the value of a godly marriage and what enduring love could look like. As there was an invasion of Goths towards Rome and many soldiers were needed, however married men, were given freedom not to go to war, so marriage was prohibited. Valentine, would convert people, then secretly marry them so they could stay at home. Valentine was arrested and brought to Rome. According to legend, while he was held captive, he gave the gospel to his jailer, the judge Asterius who said, "well if this is indeed true, I want you to prove it". Asterius brought in his blind adopted daughter, and Valentine laid hands on her and she was immediately healed. Another legend says that before Valentine was executed, he left a note for the girl and signed it, "Your Valentine". Some say this led to the practice of sending "valentines" on February 14th, the day he was beheaded. All the legends seem to agree that Valentine was martyred on February 14th.

St Valentine's Day as it is known today was also instituted as a substitute for a cruder pagan Roman holiday at the time, called Lupercalia. Lupercalia was a popular feast (February 13 – 15), celebrated in Rome, during which a group of pagan priests would sacrifice different types of animals and then run through the streets of Rome, slapping young women with the animal hides, a ritual that was thought to guarantee their health and fertility for the year.

A wise Pope Gelasius, decided sometime around the fifth century to replace Lupercalia with Saint Valentine's Day, and for me, I think cards, flowers and candy is a much better idea than being slapped with animal hides!

Our Gospel reading for today comes from the Book of 1st John

First John contains the following themes:

The Incarnation – John wrote this epistle to warn Christians of false teachers of "antichrists" from within the church who denied that Jesus had come in the flesh.

Christian Certainties - John stated that Christians can be certain of the following: Jesus is the Son of God; they have eternal life through him; God hears and answers their prayers; they are no longer in bondage to sin but are kept safe by God from the evil one; they are children of God; they can know God through his Son Jesus Christ; and Jesus is "the true God".

Love – The key command of this beautiful little book is the call to love. What was John's definition of love? "God is love and God showed his great love for us by sending "his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him", receive forgiveness, and be called his children. What he is saying is that God loves YOU, not because of who you are but because of who God is! Be sure of His love – He loves you all the time, deeply, consistently and you do not have to worry about it – the depth of His love is like no other. God sacrificed his Son for us!

We also read Psalm 63: this was written by David when he was in the Desert of Judah. He is telling of his experience of isolation from God, characterized as an earnest search for water in a "dry and weary land". This allows us to see God as the "water of life" that living water that sustains us and that satisfies completely and as the God who is always with us, whether the hostile desert environment or when our hearts are broken and need healing. Have you ever felt unsure of God's love? A time when you drifted away? Maybe because you were living in a way that you were not proud of, or your prayers weren't answered, or you just had doubts? At times like that, we can feel far away from God and because we doubt Him, we doubt His love for us.

The other day, I was watching the sun come up a favorite old song of mine came to mind: That famous "Bee Gees" song, *How Deep Is Your Love*, it made me think about my faith and our Lord. Listen to the words:

I know your eyes in the morning sun
I feel you touch my hand in the pouring rain
And the moment that you wander far from me
I wanna feel you in my arms again –

And you come to me on a summer breeze
Keeping warm in your love then you softly leave
And it's me you need to show
How deep is your love?

How deep is your love, how deep is your love?
I really need to learn 'cause we're living in a world of fools
Breaking us down when they all should let us be
We belong to you and me

I believe in you
And know you're the door to my very soul
You're the light in my deepest, darkest hour
You're my savior when I fall (When I fall)

You're the light. You're my life……

And you may not think that I care for you
When you know down inside that I really do.
And it's me you need to show
How deep is your love?

Aren't we like that sometimes? Wondering if we are loved, really loved? People are looking for love all the time – you see it in movies, you hear it in music, people go online hoping to find love and we see it on television – The Bachelor, The Bachelorette and more.

Real love, John says, comes from God. Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician, physicist and religious philosopher, who laid the foundation for the modern theory of probabilities, a man of science, said it beautifully: "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every person which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ".

So, what do we need to do to be loved by God? From the time we are young, we learn that we must earn things – from earning a lollipop if we go on the potty to earning good grades, to earning a living. We are conditioned that we have to do something to earn something – even love. What then do we have to do to earn God's love? Nothing – we did nothing to gain it, so we do not need to be fearful of losing it. Max Lucado says in his book, *A Gentle Thunder,* "God's love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn him. Ignore him. Reject him. Despise him. Disobey him. He will not change. Our evil cannot diminish His love. Our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it any more than our stupidity jeopardizes it. God doesn't love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never ceases."

So why do we doubt God's love? Maybe because of the way we love each other….I will love you if you do this, or because our love is fickle – friends and family love each other but if there is a disagreement over politics, or something else, game over! There are people who have not spoken in so long over an argument, that they cannot even remember what it was, but they will not let it go. But God's love is agape love, that unconditional love – love so deep that it is hard to imagine we don't have to do anything to earn it. But as Max Lucado says, "The love of God is like the Amazon River flowing down to water one daisy", and we are that daisy. I know I have wondered why God has blessed my life so much. Why me? I know I am not worthy, but yet he has blessed me in so many ways.

So, what do we do with this great love God has given us? We share it! Be confident of God's love and share your love with others, the more you give it away, the more you will feel His love being poured back into your life – we must keep God's love flowing like water. Reach out to someone with love and kindness today. Is there someone who annoys you and you don't really care for? Reach out to them – you never know who may be hurting, who may be having family problems, health problems. So, I will close with John 13: 33b- 35, Jesus said, "Where I am going, you cannot come. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for on another". Amen.