

Love Lessons

1st John 4:7-21

CWZepp, BWCOB, May 6, 2012

Several years ago I heard about an entry in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the shortest sermon ever given, by the Reverend John Albrecht, an Episcopal priest in Michigan. He stood up in the pulpit to preach, paused, and said simply, “Love!” And then he sat down.¹ Allegedly, one of his parishioners stated that it was the best sermon he had ever heard.

I am often tempted to follow the Reverend Albrecht’s example. Sometimes it is because of sloth or procrastination. Hopefully more often, it is because there isn’t much more to say.

We have all heard this sermon before. It was featured on the front page of Friday’s Daily New Record, in Matt Lohr’s affirmation at the National Day of Prayer Service that “our call is to love”. Many of us first learned it in Sunday School when we sang, “Love, love, love, love. The Gospel in a word is love.”

In his commentary on 1st John 4, John Wesley wrote, ““We love him, because he first loved us. This is the sum of all religion, the genuine model of Christianity. None can say more...”²

In that spirit, I do not intend to say much myself on this passage today. As always, the challenge for us is to find a way to invite this one word gospel to take deeper root in our lives, to nurture its seeds into fruitful maturity, and to challenge us to new and more faithful ways of living it out. To that end, I want to simply share a few stories with you. They come from an arena that is not typically associated with love – at least not the self-giving, self-sacrificing love of which we know the gospel speaks. From the world of sports, these two stories illustrate love in action. They are both true stories, and it is my hope that in them, we might see something of value to inspire our own living in love.

*Play clip of “The Home Run” from The Responsibility Project by Liberty Mutual Insurance.*³

Love costs something. For the women of Central Washington University that day, doing the loving thing cost them a game. It was a unique and special moment – one that might be called either a deeply human moment or, depending on your perspective, a “God Moment.” Sometimes that is all it takes. The New Testament is full of stories of people seizing the moment to act in love. Think of the Good Samaritan, Jesus’ encounter with the woman caught in adultery, Peter and Cornelius, or Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, just to name a few.

¹ From *Homiletics Online*.

http://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/illustrations_for_installment.asp?installment_id=2442

² <http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?com=wes&b=62&c=4>

³ Available: <http://responsibility-project.libertymutual.com/films/the-home-run#fbid=lyhCK7ipJk4>.

But just as often, if not more so, love is not realized in a single moment or event. Sometimes love shows its truest face not in a moment or even a series of moments, but in a steady progression of faithful action over years or even a lifetime. Such is the love we shall see in our next story.

Play feature on Patrick Henry Hughes from ESPN, 2006.⁴

Whether it happens in a moment or is lived out over a lifetime, love like this doesn't just happen. It comes from somewhere. It is a character trait learned, nurtured, and tested in our living. Now I don't know where the folks in these stories learned of love, or what preceded the actions in these particular stories. But if we take seriously the assertion in 1st John that, "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God," then I believe we can say that whether they were conscious of it or not, their loving actions were of God.

Several years ago, a news story came out about a little boy, maybe three or four years old, who fell into a septic tank at his pre-school. Now why there was an open septic tank at a pre-school is beyond me, but it happened. And believe it or not, the name of the preschool was St. John the Baptist School. (You can't make this stuff up!) At any rate, the boy's mother saw her son fall in and being unable to reach him any other way, she jumped in to get him. They couldn't get out on their own, so the mother simply held her son up to keep him safe until someone came to lift them out. Eventually they were rescued, and the father of the boy later said that though his son had been bathed several times, he still had a peculiar odor about him. (Wisely, he did not say anything to the media about how his wife smelled!)⁵ But is this not true love? This mother was willing to do whatever it took to save her son. And is this not like the love of God, which as our scripture this morning tells us was demonstrated by God doing whatever it took to reach us, sending Jesus into the world that we might live (and love) through him.

We love, because God first loved us. And if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and God's perfect love becomes complete in us. May it be so

⁴ Available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qTiYA1WiY8>.

⁵ From a sermon by Robert W. Prim. Online: <http://www.nacoocheepresbyterian.org/files/20090503%20-%20Sermon.pdf>