

12 August 2007
“One Another” Sermon Series
“Love One Another”
Romans 13:8–10; Mark 12:28–34

The Secret of the Overflowing Cup

Dear friends, we continue with our 5-week sermon series on the “one another” passages in the Bible. Pastor Jim started us off last week with an inspired message about “forgive one another.” This week we continue with the instruction “love one another.”

In selecting the themes for this sermon series we had several themes to choose from. There are well over a dozen “one anothers” in the Bible. But to choose “love one another” was a no brainer. There are more passages encouraging us to love one another than any other “one another” in the Bible. This is the biggie! It’s the gateway to the others. There would be no Forgive One Another; Encourage One Another, Bear One Another’s Burdens if we did not first love one another.

Love for one another is the fountainhead which allows and inspires us to forgive, encourage and bear. All the “one anothers” find their source and energy through love.

Having said that, I had a conversation last Sunday evening, and it completely changed my approach to this sermon. Here’s where it took me. The profound nugget of truth from this conversation is mentioned in both our Bible readings. Jesus calls the second and greatest commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Our ability to love one another is likened to the love we have for ourselves. The instruction “love one another” assumes self love. In fact, I would daresay that there’s an intimate correlation between our self love and our ability to love one another.

The author of Psalm 23 writes:

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

He feels so filled by the steadfast love and abundant support of God that he’s more than filled. He’s received so much of God’s prodigious and unlimited grace that he’s downright overflowing with it! “My cup overflows,” he says with soaring soul.

The overflowing cup is precisely the connection between self love and our ability to love one another. Love comes from God. God is the author of love. St. John tells us, “We love because God first loved us.”

Friends, we do not generate love. What we are is a vessel, a vessel that can contain love. What love we can give to one another is the love that has first been poured into us. We have received

love from many sources. We have received the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. And we have received love from many people along the way: parents, siblings, teachers, kind strangers, grandparents, coworkers, etc. But if we were to trace back to the original source from where all of these human loves stem, we would find they all had their origins in the love of God.

Whether God's love pours directly into our cup, or whether it's passed on from cup after cup until it reaches us, it all comes to us from God.

[Demonstration; pour water into a cup until it overflows]

God intends to fill our cup, our ability to contain and receive love. And God intends to keep on filling our cup, so that we never experience a time without being filled, filled to the point of overflowing. In receiving the love of God, we in turn, can love one another.

But a problem develops when we lose our capacity to contain love of self.

[Demonstration: poke hole in cup and then pour]

Jesus instructs us to "love your neighbor as you love yourself." But if we have lost our ability to receive love, if the love given to us runs right through us, then we are never filled. And we never have the ability to overflow in love for one another.

There are many forces that punch holes in us. Habitual criticism from a parent or spouse, a hostile environment at work, bullying at school: these are all hole punchers. This humorous sign hung in an office: "The beatings will continue until morale improves." Ironically, the church has been known to encourage us to punch self-inflicted holes of our own.

Pride has been targeted as the chief sin. In our attempt to avoid pride I fear that we've overcorrected our steering and driven onto the opposite shoulder, self-abasement. To avoid thinking too highly of ourselves, the church has been guilty of encouraging a piety of unnatural debasement of the self. But this was never God's intention!

We've become so good at it, the church has even come up with a name for this: vermiculite theology! Worm theology! You know what I'm talking about. It's self talk that sounds like this:

*"I am a worm! I am so crummy! I'm despicable! I am the lowest of all creatures!
I deserve nothing but scorn!"*

Between criticism from outer sources and things we tell ourselves, we get caught into a cycle of self loathing. We start to believe that we're deserving of contempt and punishment. Tapes of self hatred run in our head 24/7. What kind of holes does this punch into our souls?

If this is a type of piety, then it's a sick piety. If God is love, as the Bible tells us, does this type of thinking sound like it comes from the heart of love? Does this come from the heart of the one who loves us?

The truth is, you are wholly valued by God! The God who made you, who fashioned you in the depth of your mother's womb delights in your existence! When Jesus says that God knows the number of hairs on your head, this is testimony to the great love God has for you. God delights in every detail of who you are!

God loved the world (and insert your name here) so much that God gave us God's only begotten

Son. This is testimony to the love God has for you. Jesus went to the cross for you. And if you had been the only one, the only human being, that would have been reason enough for him to do this thing!

You have personal worth and dignity as a human being. The fact that God made you and brought you into existence endows you with a fundamental value and dignity that cannot be denied. In exactly the way God made you, down to every aspect, you are perfect! You are every bit as important and worthy of love and respect as any other human being!

I know that many of you are going about with sizeable holes in your self concept. There is a river of grace waiting to fill you. I tell you, this is truth! Believe this! God loves you. You are loveable. You are worthy, worthy of love. The topic for today is Love One Another. It might seem off the topic to talk so much about love of self. But I bring up this need for self love because there is a direct connection between our capacity to love others and our love of self. Unless we have a capacity for self acceptance, unless we are able to receive the abundant love that God pours out on us every minute of our life, we will never know the secret of the overflowing cup

[Demonstration: Pour into cup]

The secret of the overflowing cup is this: When you have love for yourself, you will, by design, without fail, love others. It will simply pour out of you. To love one another is a fruit. It's not the vine, that's Jesus. It's not the branch, that's you. It's the fruit, produced by the love of Jesus flowing through you. It all stems back to God, and God is love.