

"The Four Things That Matter Most: I Love You"
John 12:1- 8; 13:13:1-5, 34-35; 15:13

Today we get to the "I love you" phrase from Dr. Byock's four phrases we need to say to our loved ones in life and at the time of death. As I thought of the primacy of love, I thought of Bishop Michael Curry's sermon at the Royal wedding back in May of this year. Here are a couple of clips from that sermon (first clip: .34-1:10, and 7:39-8:59):

<https://youtu.be/OhV0PL49d3Y>

(for second service) Here are some of his words about love:

The late Dr Martin Luther King Jr once said, and I quote: "We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love. And when we do that, we will make of this old world a new world, for love is the only way."

There's power, power in love...Not just in its romantic forms, but any form, any shape of love. There's a certain sense in which when you are loved, and you know it, when someone cares for you, and you know it, when you love and you show it - it actually feels right. There is something right about it. And there's a reason for it. The reason has to do with the source. We were made by a power of love, and our lives were meant - and are meant - to be lived in that love. That's why we are here.

Ultimately, the source of love is God himself: the source of all of our lives...

Think and imagine a world where love is the way...

Imagine our homes and families where love is the way. Imagine neighborhoods and communities where love is the way.

Imagine governments and nations where love is the way. Imagine business and commerce where this love is the way.

Imagine this tired old world where love is the way. When love is the way - unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive.

When love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again.

When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook.

When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary.

When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more.

When love is the way, there's plenty good room - plenty good room - for all of God's children.

Because when love is the way, we actually treat each other, well... like we are actually family.

When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all, and we are brothers and sisters, children of God.

My brothers and sisters, that's a new heaven, a new earth, a new world, a new human family."

Since love is so essential to our lives and to the fulfillment of God's vision for our lives, it is important that we become intentional about expressing it. Yet, expressing love is not always easy. Dr. Byock writes, "As important as it is -maybe because it is so important – 'I love you' can also be the three most difficult words for us to say. But sometimes when certain words are hard to come by, people find other ways to express the love that is in their hearts."

And that is exactly what Jesus did in his final meal with the disciples. He went to extra lengths to show his love for the disciples. We are going to use the five love languages from Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages* to see how Jesus expressed his love. My hope is as we look at the example of Jesus, that we find renewed energy to follow it in our own lives. (the following headlines on the screen)

1. **Gifts:** In chapter 12 of the Gospel of John, an interesting incident is recorded. It was about Jesus' willingness to receive a gift of love. Keep in mind, he was the one who gave all he had for the sake of love as we hear in the words from John 15:13 "13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." In the story from chapter 12 we hear about Mary giving Jesus an expensive gift. Right before his last supper with the disciples, Jesus received a very expensive gift. "Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." John 12:1-8 Isn't it interesting that the one who objected to this gift was the one who struggled most with Jesus' way of love? The one who wanted power and worldly success saw this gift as a waste of resources. The one who decided to betray love, was the very one who didn't value the gifts which Jesus gave. How easy is it to keep our resources to ourselves in a culture that tells us that there is never enough for our consumption? How might giving of our resources help us to expand and express the gift of love? If we looked at our resources as ways to express love, what would our budget or spending patterns look like?
2. **Acts of Service and Physical Touch:** It is said that actions speak louder than words. And Jesus knew that so well. He began expressing his love through an act of service by washing the feet of the disciples. John 13:1-5 "Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved

them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him." Jesus left us a powerful example of humble service. Acts of service are so powerful that it is hard to miss their point. As their leader, Jesus would have been the last person expected to wash their feet. This would have been the job of a servant in the household. His example of humble service became a powerful message of love for generations to come. Here is what he said according to verse 15: "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." Our actions are a very important part of expressing love. In addition to the fact that washing the feet of the disciples was an act of service, it involved physical touch. You can't wash someone's feet without touching them. In that act, there is great intimacy and vulnerability. There is also great power in a physical touch. Think of when someone gave you a hug when you needed it or when someone sat close to you at a time of deep grief or fear.

3. **Words of Affirmation:** Jesus used words of Affirmation with the disciples. He said out loud that he loved them. This was not easy in a culture where men were supposed to be tough and when one of his disciples was about to betray him. This is what Jesus said according to verses 34 and 35 (screen): "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." How often do we miss out on expressing our love? It is not always easy, especially if you grew up in a household where love was withheld or just assumed. But there is great power in such words.
4. **Quality Time:** Jesus spent his precious final hours with his disciples. He took the time to celebrate Passover with them and to remind them of his teachings. In his three years of ministry, Jesus spent most of his time teaching and serving. He took time to pray and to rest. He also shared his time very generously with others.

No matter how we choose to express love and to say "I love you," it is important to be intentional about it. Just like Jesus expressed his love to the disciples in so many ways, we are invited to do the same. Sharing the love of God is identified in our mission statement as a church to be the way to transform lives. We seek to share it through giving, relationships, words, service, and time. I am so grateful for the many creative ways we are able to share this love from caring relationships inside the church to caring relationship with those in our larger community such as the nursing home residents and the children and staff at Jackson Primary.

According to Dr. Byock expressing love is vital to making our relationships complete and whole. Dr. Byock tells the story of Gunter, one of his colleagues at the University of Montana who found saying “I love you” so difficult because it hadn’t been modeled for him. They didn’t show it. They didn’t say it. Gunter and his father came from a long line of stoic German farmers. His father was close to death, and he asked to speak with Gunter alone. Gunter could not have been more dumbfounded when his stoic Lutheran father asked, “Son, would you please shave me?” Knowing his father, Gunter realized that his father was really asking his son to touch him. But because Gunter had learned from Dr. Byock about the importance of expressing love, he responded positively to the request. It was a bit strange at first for Gunter to touch his father’s face in such an intimate, tender way. Gunter recalls seeing his father’s shaving cup and brush in the bathroom closet at the nursing home. He remembered as a young boy watching his father carefully shave. Gunter took his father’s old shaving brush, cup, and special shaving soap and worked up a rich, smooth lather. As Gunter stood behind his father and shaved the front of his neck, chills ran up Gunter’s spine. He realized he was replaying a scene from his childhood. On his thirteenth birthday, Gunter’s father gave him a Gillette safety razor, and that morning the father showed his son how to shave for the first time. He said, “He stood behind me in front of the bathroom mirror...and showed me how to scoop the lather up as I shaved my neck. It was an important rite of passage for me at the time. I realized that we were conducting a rite of passage for my father too as he prepared for his death.” This opened the door for Gunter to brush his father’s hair, feed him, help him with his bedpan and other physical needs. “They had come full circle. Gunter described his final visit with his father as, ‘quite simply, the best time we’ve ever had together. I asked Gunter how his father’s gift of touch had affected him. ‘Every time I think about it I feel a rush of gratitude and love,’ Gunter said. ‘The sadness at his death is there, but so is the intense joy at the ways in which we were able to connect in those final days.’”

Don’t miss out on those opportunities in your life to express love as you follow the example of Jesus’ love! Never forget that there is an incredible power in expressing love! Amen.

Weekly Bible Devotional
The Four Things That Matter Most: I Love You
November 25, 2018

Scripture for Sunday: John 12:1- 8; 13:1-5, 34-35; 15:13

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

13:1-5

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

34-35

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

15:13

¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Notes on The Text:

I have selected several passages this week as I plan on talking about the way of Jesus as a path of love. Jesus expressed his love in many ways so that the people around him would get it. He expressed it through words, actions, presence, gifts, and physical touch. In thinking about the ways we are invited to express love as we follow the way of Jesus, Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages* came to mind. The five love languages are: Gifts, acts of service, words of affirmation, quality time, and touch. Each of the Bible passages conveys one of or more of those languages of love. Keep in mind that the timeframe of these passages is the end of Jesus' ministry. He was headed to Jerusalem where he would end up getting crucified. Each of these passages gives us a clear example of how to express our love to others.

Gifts: The story of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus reveals to us Jesus' willingness to receive a gift of love because he was the one who gave all he had for the sake of love. It is interesting that Judas objected to this gift of love. The one who wanted power and worldly success saw this gift as a waste of resources. The one who decided to betray love, was the very one who didn't value the gifts which Jesus gave. We can relate to Judas' perspective. How easy is it to keep our resources to ourselves in a culture that tells us that there is never enough for our consumption or our fears? How might giving of our resources help us to expand and express the gift of love? If we looked at our resources as ways to express love, what would our budget or spending patterns look like?

Service and Touch: In chapter 13, Jesus does something radical. He washes the feet of the disciples. He shows his love through an act of service. Jesus left us a powerful example of humble service. Acts of service are so powerful that it is hard to miss their point. As their leader, Jesus would have been the last person expected to wash their feet. This would have been the job of a servant in the household and not the leader. But his lesson of humble service became a powerful example of love for generations to come. Our actions are a very important part of expressing love. In addition to the fact that washing the feet of the disciples was an act of service, it involved physical touch. You can't wash someone's feet without touching them. In that act, there is great intimacy and vulnerability. Yet, there is also great power that nothing else could communicate. Think of when someone gave you a hug when you needed it or when someone sat close to you at a time of deep grief or fear.

Words: Jesus used words of Affirmation with the disciples. He said out loud that he loved them. This was not easy in a culture where men were supposed to be tough and when one of his disciples was about to betray him. How often do we miss out on expressing our love? It is not always easy, especially if you grew up in a household where love was withheld or just assumed.

Time: Jesus spent his precious final hours with his disciples. He took the time to celebrate the Passover meal with them and to remind them of his teachings. In his three years of ministry, Jesus spent most of his time teaching and serving. He took time to pray and to rest. He also shared his time very generously with others.

For Reflection:

Since love is so essential to our lives and to the fulfillment of God's vision for our lives, it is important that we become intentional about our ways of expressing love. But expressing love is not always easy. Dr. Byock writes, "As important as it is -maybe because it is so important - 'I love you' can also be the three most difficult words for us to say. But sometimes when certain words are hard to come by, people find other ways to express the love that is in their hearts."

No matter how we choose to say, "I love you," it is important to do it. Just like Jesus expressed his love for the disciples in so many ways, we are invited to do the same. Sharing the love of God is identified in our mission statement as a church to be the way

to transform lives. We seek to share it through giving, relationships, words, service, and time. I am so grateful for the many creative ways we are able to share this love from caring relationships inside the church to caring relationships with those in our larger community and world such as the nursing home residents, the hungry, and the children and staff at Jackson Primary. Last Sunday afternoon as I shared the care cards written by many of you with our Jewish brothers and sisters after the massacre in Pittsburgh, I saw the deep joy they brought to them. At a low point when anti-Semitism seems to be on the rise in our country, it was so powerful for them to know that so many people in the community care about them.

Prayer by Joyce Rupp:

All Encompassing Heart,
where there is impatience, let me bring kindness.
Where there is strife, let me bring harmony.
Where there is hurt, let me bring healing.
Where there is rigidity, let me bring openness.
Where there is judgment, let me bring understanding.

O wide and Spacious Love,
turn me toward your unconditional acceptance.
I seek to be a vessel of your great love.
Let me carry your love into all parts of my life
and pour it forth willingly and generously. Amen.