

Pastor Roy's sermon from April 22, 2018

Children: What is love? (Jesus Loves Me. . .parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, friends). Is love always easy and **fun**? Or is it sometimes **hard work**? Today is my sister, Amy's birthday. This past week her daughter became a mother and so my sister is a grandma and I am a great uncle. When we were younger, sometimes we fought. We could annoy each other like nobody else in the world. That's power. But our love was intense too. We played a lot of games and kept each other company a lot. We would talk when the going got rough. Our memories go back all the way. Love keeps the memories going. Sometimes love is hard work. But it's worth it right?

What do the lessons we read today all have in common? (tough question . . .) They suggest an expensive love, love with abandon, healing love, active love, love of the spirit. They invite us to the love of Christ which is life, a giving and mutual love.

As we consider Jesus' love, we are reminded that love gives and receives. Imagine a love that only gives or only receives. That's not really love. . .is it? But real love is *not* about me or about you, it's about. . .**us**. We learn to love by being loved, by being cared for. We learn it from Jesus. We learn it from parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, sometimes people we barely know as well as by friends.

All of creation receives and gives according to the nature of our creator.

The Lord is my shepherd. The good shepherd is willing to give **all** for the sheep. Here is expensive love. Of course, love is always expensive. As the expression goes, "Talk is cheap." But love is costly because love releases power to another. Real love is not about getting one's way but about giving one's way away in a healthy manner. We often are tempted to think of love as thrilling mountain peak experiences, giving and receiving gifts, or the way to get what "I" want. A happy existence for sale.

But doesn't experience teach us otherwise? Love's benefit is long term. Not one measured in smiles and exhilarating moments, though clearly these have their place. The costly work of acting in love precedes or at least coincides with the joy of love.

Jesus offers himself for love--on the cross. The reward of resurrection follows. Jesus' followers learn this in the days, months, years, centuries, yes, millennia following his death. We are still learning this resurrection love which we know as a Good Shepherd's love.

Resurrection is not a reward. It is love's benefit. Resurrection is being united to God by the link of mercy. Resurrection has no beginning. It has no end. Resurrection has no limit. Resurrection life goes on in ceaseless wonder—in all directions. Beginning with God, moving through us to others, returning to God.

Resurrection love is a fellowship. As we learn from Jesus to give ourselves and our power away, we learn the value and beauty of love. This is not a cheap trip. This is not trying to get by with as little as possible. This is not about trying to get more than we give. The love of Christ we proclaim is a supremely costly love. And Jesus never asks us to do anything that he has not demonstrated.

None of us is perfect, and we must constantly be returning to the source of our love. But that love is not neglectful. It is not abusive or selfish. But it also does not allow itself to be destroyed in the loving. We are fragile human beings. We must take care of ourselves and each other.

We all need to know when it is time to pull back and allow God and friends and nature to love us. Love is about living in wholeness. There *are* times when love must say, "No, I cannot relate to you any longer. You are destroying me." Love is never about self-destruction. Love gives so that healing is offered and received. When healing is no longer possible, we must pull back and be healed.

Sometimes we need help from therapists, healers who make it their work to help those who struggle in the valleys of life. We depend on others because we cannot heal ourselves.

Our society appears to be coming more and more isolated. Technology not only moves us apart at an ever faster pace, but it also allows us to imagine, now more than ever before that everyone else is happier and more successful than I am. This is clearly not true, but we feel it nonetheless. We are all in the same boat. We all need each other. We all need help. We all need mercy, day by day.

Jesus' resurrection offers us this mercy and hope. The resurrection is at work all around us. May we have eyes to see it and ears to hear it in our families, friends, neighbors—even those we don't know.