

May 1, 2016 “The Love Equation” 1 John 3:11-16

In spite of any pleading I might do, I am not a mathematician. You may well say at the end of this message, “I never saw the equation.” What I remember about doing equations in High School some 45 years ago is that it was never acceptable to simply write down the final answer. You had to show all the steps by which you arrived at it, or you would get a mark of 1 out of 10. The process, the steps were as important as the answer itself. It is in that sense that this message represents the love equation of the New Testament or Biblical Faith. Disciples of Jesus, Christians in that sense, recognize the steps, the logic, the teaching of Jesus in what is about to unfold regarding loving people as Jesus has loved us.

There is a sense in which a better title for this message might indeed have been, “An Old Man's Insight”, Pt. 2. And the reason that is not the case is that these messages are already part of a series that endeavours as a key insight to expose this reality: the word Christian was not chosen by the followers of Jesus in the 1st century to describe what we believe or whose we are. In the simplest terms possible, Christian was the charge under which the Roman Empire came to justify killing 1,000s and 1,000s of people like us, as sport, as entertainment, and finally as the political solution, to solving the problem of unifying a fractured and fracturing empire.

From the beginning the followers of Jesus, were called disciples. Disciples were, as they are chosen to be disciples by the Master. There was a commitment of submission to the Master in all things. Whether we are comfortable with that word or not the reality is we are the 21st century, in this area of Ontario, disciples of Jesus. And here is where the teaching of that old man, the only disciple among the 12 to live to be an old man,...this is where his teaching on

this matter of loving one another begins. It is the first line in the solution to the equation. “This is the message you heard from the beginning.” John is 90 years old. A patriarch of the believers in Jesus, the disciples of Jesus in his time. And to anyone who reads his letter, his first letter, he says, this is the message you heard from us...yes, myself, Peter, James, John and the others from the very beginning.

It comes from the breaking of bread and drinking of wine in the upper room on the Thursday evening of Holy Week, the day before the crucifixion of Jesus. Four days before the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning. Jesus last lesson was, “I give you a new commandment, love one another. As I have loved you, love one another. John begins this passage of his first letter with a word of confession. There has never been a time when you did not hear the disciples of Jesus echoing the words of our Lord and Saviour. From the beginning we shared this message. “We should love one another.”

The second line of the equation acknowledges that it is not easy to do, nor does it come naturally. It takes effort. It takes will. It takes commitment to Jesus. It takes the acknowledgment that the One we serve, Jesus, is none other than the God who made the universe, and all that is. We are involved even as Cain and Able were, in spiritual warfare. Not against flesh and blood, but against the evil one. Sin is real. It is the chaos factor in our lives. If we use nothing but human logic and the strength of our own will power, we can never defeat it nor erase it. Righteousness is not just a matter of pulling up your boot straps. It is a matter of submitting to the will of the Holy God who redeems and has redeemed us from sin in the one and the only Lord Jesus. All the bad stuff that pops up and at times

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seems to trap us, has its source in the enemy, the evil one. That same serpent who whispered temptations instructions in the Garden of Eden...that God does not tell us the truth. That sin is not life threatening. So John tells us the source of sinful deeds, which do seem to come to us, so naturally, so easily have their source in the mind and intent of the evil one. At the very least, part of what that means is that the struggle to be a disciple of Jesus never really ends. And is this not our experience? We are continually having to struggle with the choice of doing what Jesus would have us do, as opposed to following our natural inclination. John says beware. Be on guard. Do not be seduced.

He says something else that frankly did not make much sense to me when I was young. The world is not the same as it was when I was young. Line 3 of working out this equation is a troubling one. "Do not be surprised if the world hates you." As you know I like movies. I tend not simply to be entertained by some of them, I tend to analyze them. I can count fewer than the fingers on one hand, the movies in which preachers, Christians, are portrayed positively. The exceptions, for the most part are Christian movies, Biblical movies, heroes of the faith movies. If a movie has a Christian character in it, he (it is usually a man) is a bit of a brute, hard to live with, judgemental, self righteous, a hypocrite. An unlikeable sort. John says do not be surprised if the world treats you poorly, or hates you. The church is not popular in this era close to the end of my life. The Bible is, outside of the church, viewed as a biased, and human document, concocted to enslave the majority of those who read it. There is an assumption that if we are a people of faith, we parked our minds somewhere along the way. That we blindly follow those who lead us. John writes...don't be surprised. It is true that we no longer belong to this world.

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And that brings us to line 4 of this equation. The love we have for one another, the love we receive from one another is the ultimate “real and present sign” that we have passed over from death to life eternal. It is not only the ultimate weapon in the arsenal we use to witness to the world, it is the ultimate sign of the reality of our faith. Disciples of Jesus care about people around them in hundreds of ways that are grounded in reality and what is happening to those people in real time, in the real world. We celebrate with those who have new babies. We care about those who are going through tough times. We pray for people we do not even know personally. We share our goods and we share our currency to provide the necessities of life to those who lack them. That is what a food bank is about. Food for people who cannot afford it. Providing the necessities of life to people who lack them.

Line 5 has to do with the reality of death and dying. When we fail to love others, the reality of death and deadness is exposed. It is one of the tragedies of the 21st century that there are churches and individuals that have not learned this truth. If we are angry and judgemental in our relationships in the church, (and remember the church is not some super corporation, it is the gathering of those who would worship Jesus and serve Him as He leads us)...if we are angry and judgemental in our relationships with one another what we expose is that death is in our midst. Being alive in Christ calls for something totally different. Something out of this world. Which leads to line 6.

Hate. It is the worst thing one person can do to another. In the world of John this is so revolutionary thinking...it is hard for us to see it. He is millenia ahead of his time. Or to put it another way, it is so obvious he is filled with the Spirit of God as opposed to the

spirit of this age in which so many use and infuse hate as a means to grasp at the levers of worldly power.

There is always someone who will ask the question, but what is love really? Is it an emotion? Is it something that is governed by hormones? Is it a dreamy state that can never really last in the midst of the challenges of life in the real world? What is real about “love”?

And that leads us to the final line in the solution to this ultimate equation. Let us define what love is. I have said before in this series, if you want to know what Jesus meant when he said the words He said, you have to look at what Jesus did. He said, “I give you a new commandment. Love one another. As I have loved you, love one another.” What did Jesus do? In less than 24 hours He had been arrested, whipped, stripped and put to death on Calvary's cross. Why? His words. “The Son of Man is come into the world to save sinners.” Love is about redemption. The fictional character named Rose Dawson in the movie “Titanic”, says this about Jack Dawson, and his love for her. “He saved me in every way a person can be saved.” What the line means in context...is his love changed my life. It did not close windows. It opened doors. So that she could live, and experience so many wonderful things.

Jesus died to save sinners. He has saved us in every way a person can be saved. And in calling us to love one another, and to love others outside these walls, He has called us to lay down our lives for others. To live sacrificially for God and in this oh so needy world.

John ends this portion with these words. “Jesus Christ laid

down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”

Let us pray;

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth. As we hear your word, and know it is your word for us, help us to submit our will to your own. Help us to spend our lives in the service of others. Help us to be a blessing to the people we meet in the street today and tomorrow. Use us to make the point you love us, and all people with an everlasting love. Make us your agents, serving your holy purpose. Amen.

This series is not over. The final chapters...there are at least 2 and maybe more...will have to wait. God willing, I will see you in 3 weeks and the journey will continue.