

## What's Love Got To Do With It?

[based on John 13:34 & 35]

This morning's message may possibly be the last one I am privileged to deliver from this pulpit, so I am changing strategy and will be presenting an anecdotal homily as a break from tradition.

A Sunday School teacher was honoured one Sunday by her church for 25 years of faithful service in teaching the young people of that congregation. She was presented with pin and a plaque describing her faithful service, her dedication, and the love she gave so generously to her students.

When asked to speak, she said, "I am surprised you would honour me this way. I get so much out of working with these young Christians, that it really doesn't seem like 'work' at all. I enjoy teaching the children, and I especially enjoy seeing their eyes light up as they learn about Jesus' love for them. Honestly, I receive so much more than I could ever give."

This is what is meant by a phrase you may have heard before - "The Non-Exclusive Good." You see, there is nothing exclusive about goodness as it's never just one person who benefits. In fact, most of the time, a number of people benefit from another's goodness, sacrifice, or unselfishness - just like our Sunday School teacher.

Let me share another story with you about a man called Art. Art was on the Church Board. The Board called for members of the congregation to volunteer to join with them, in forming a visiting committee. They attended a seminar and then set out to begin their visiting campaign.

Since the church was only 40 years old, some of the charter members were still alive, so it was decided that these members should be the first on the visitation list. The team wanted those particular folks to know how much the church appreciated what they had sacrificed, in order to begin a church in that town 40 years ago. One couple named Art and Lorraine were charged with visiting John and Maureen. Now John and Maureen could not figure out for the life of them, why they were being visited.

Their questions included "What do you want? Do you want us to serve on some committee, or to increase our weekly givings?"

"No" came the reply, "We just came to see how you were doing."

For John and Maureen, life had been getting more difficult, and they began to pour out their hearts to Art and Lorraine. They told of their aches and pains, the heartache of growing old, of becoming forgetful, of not physically being able to do so many of those things they once could manage easily. They told of the sense of thankfulness for the church and its ministry through the years, and of the concern its people had for them. Not only had they not been forgotten, but their fine work from so many years ago was still being appreciated. The two couples visited and visited, and then they prayed together.

When Art and Lorraine returned to the church, they shared their experience with the others on the team. Art said he didn't do as much talking as his wife, but instead opted to listen and observe what was happening during their visit. He was overwhelmed by the thankfulness of both John and Maureen, and by the love Lorraine gave to them not only during their conversation, but especially as she prayed over them.

Art admitted that he was skeptical in the beginning, whether these types of visits would really do anything, or mean anything, to anyone. But now, he saw that love, caring, and kindness, could affect people in a real way. And he said, "I think I got more out of that visit than anyone else."

And it showed, because Art became a faithful visitor in the years that followed. Later he became the Chairperson of the Church Council and he did a great job, especially at difficult times. All benefited from Art's knowledge.

He was well respected and served as a role-model, for his kindness and his willingness to listen, to care, and to be active in the life of the church. Art always gave 100% whenever the Holy Spirit gave a nudge.

The goodness which was demonstrated during that particular evening visit with John and Maureen, had an effect on many lives for many years to come.

There is no exclusiveness about goodness in God's economy. Everyone benefits from one act of goodness, one act of kindness, one act of caring. Yes, in God's economy, nothing is done for selfishness, but instead, for the goodness of all.

And Jesus demonstrated that concept in a clear and marvelous way on the cross of Calvary. He gave his life for us, but in his dying, everyone benefited. We received God's grace through the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus gave, and then we received the benefits of a new, eternal life because of the resurrection. In God's economy, goodness is non-exclusive - everyone gains, everyone receives, everyone benefits.

And that brings into play, serious questions for you and for me. In what do we believe? In what do we trust? Where are we in our faith journey? Where are we in God's economy?

A college professor answered his students who professed not to believe in God, with the following, "That's fine, but you can't build a life philosophy on a negative."

As Christians, we build our life philosophy around God and his grace. As a result, we reap the benefits of a life that has more meaning, more purpose, and more fullness. In God's 's economy, when you let go of self and surrender to him, you see life take on a larger meaning, with a more fulfilling and purposeful context.

One last story...

A Persian fable says that the earth was created as a great barren plain, without tree or plant. An angel was sent to scatter the choicest seeds on every spot.

Satan, seeing the seeds on the ground, determined to destroy them. So, he buried all the seeds in the soil and summoned sun and rain to make them rot away.

With a feeling of triumph and a sly smile on his face, the Devil took great satisfaction in his act.

But weeks later, his smile changed to scorn, and the feeling of triumph turned to the feeling of being beaten again by God, for all those seeds he had worked so hard at burying to rot in the ground with rain and sunshine, now germinated and sprang up to life and clothed all the earth with unbelievable plants and beautiful flowers.

Jesus knows how it worked in God's economy when he said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

And Jesus proved that, with his death on the cross. He died, he gave of himself, and he bore much fruit. A life in God's economy is a life of giving and goodness, and that goodness gives in a far greater way than we can imagine. In God's economy, there are multiple dividends in giving - both the giver and the receiver gain. In God's economy, neither side is excluded from the good. When people can look beyond themselves, when people can be in God's economy where goodness, unselfishness, love and compassion are the fruit, then love is stretched out...and the dividends are far-reaching.

My friends, biblical love is a conscious effort to pursue the well-being of another person. It is not the same as 'liking' someone. "Liking" is just a feeling, but the decision to love means that, regardless of our feelings, we will seek the best for another person.

Love is seen in our *behaviour* toward one another...how we treat others, regardless of how they treat us.

In Colossians 3 we read, "Regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it...and let every detail in your lives - words, actions, whatever - be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way."

Thank you for the love that Sherry and I have experienced in this congregation from the day we first arrived.

May *God* continue to richly bless each one of you, as you continue to serve with genuine love.

Amen