

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR LOVE

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, February 12, 2006

John 14:23-29



“Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine,

but is from the Father who sent me. “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

The Living Bible translates John 14: 27 like this: “I am leaving you with a gift-- Peace of mind and heart! And the peace that I give is not fragile like the peace that the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid.”

Valentine's Day is not meant to be celebrated in Worship, and we are not planning to do it today either. Nevertheless, the Valentine's custom to express affection and love for those near and dear to us is in line with what we believe and do as Christians. For today, we have encouraged our Church-family to bring friends to Church so that we can tell them how much we appreciate them. Love and friendship is in the air, and we cannot resist talking about it!

There are many stories about relationships between people, beginning with Adam and Eve. They say that Eve never argued, but at night, while Adam was sleeping, she made sure to count his ribs!

A certain woman, on her deathbed, turned to her husband and instructed, "Earl, after I'm gone, I want you to find someone else to love." "If you say so, dear" Earl answered. "She can have all my jewelry if she wants..." "All right, dear," Earl said. "...And all my clothes..." "That won't work, dear, she's a size ten and you're a size fourteen!"

The Gospel according to John describes one of the final discussions between Jesus and his followers. The setting was intimate. The writing was already on the wall. They were talking about their fears and uncertainties, but Jesus talked about his love and concern for us. “I am leaving you with a gift-- Peace of mind and heart! And the peace that I give is not fragile like the peace that the world gives.” The promise is that, in a sincere relationship with Jesus Christ, even under the most difficult circumstances, peace of mind and heart, will always be with us.

I have seen that "peace of mind and heart" in the lives and relationships of God's people. Jesus gives an inner peace and blessed assurance that would reside within us so that we can live life, deal with one another, and even endure hardship without fear or ever-losing hope! Even in the worst hurricane of our lives, there is always a rainbow of hope. I have seen that peace of mind and heart evident on the faces of God's children even while entering the darkest valley of death. If you are wondering what I am talking about or think that this is typical religious jargon, My Friend, then it might be time to ask yourself again, or for the first time, about your personal relationship with God. When you and I are at peace with God, Jesus provides us with a foundation of peace for mind and heart to deal with all our human relationships.

In the busy world of ours, many still crave that kind of peace. Peace of mind and heart! I know that for people with young children, the words peace and home may not exactly always go together. For instance, two men talked about world problems, high taxes, the cost of living, and finally their families. "I have three boys," one of them said proudly. "That's a nice family," sighed the other man. "I wish to heaven I had three children." "Don't you have any children?" the proud father asked with a touch of sympathy in his voice. "Oh, yes," sighed the second man, "I have six."

How can one find peace in the home? How can we strengthen the precious ties that bind us as husbands and wives, parents and children? A good place to begin is to understand that each of us has a need for recognition. We all need to be appreciated -- especially by those closest to us.

A man came home from work one day to find the house in shambles. The beds had not been made, the kitchen sink was filled with dirty dishes, the children's' clothes and toys and books were scattered throughout the house. Besides that, dinner was not ready. "What in the world happened?" the man asked his wife when he saw the mess. "Nothing," she said, "absolutely nothing! You are always wondering what I do all day long. Well, look. Today, I didn't do it"

We all need appreciation. A few words of kindness can make someone's day! We find peace in the home by making time for plenty of recognition of those around us.

Have you heard about the four stages of a common cold in the life of a married couple? The first year the husband says, "Sugar, I'm worried about you. You have a bad snuffle! I want you in bed to rest. Your meals will be sent up from Rossini's. It is arranged. Second year: "Maybe you'd better lie down, honey. Nothing like a little rest if you feeling bad. I will bring you something to eat. Do we have any soup in the house? Third year: "don't you take a couple of aspirin?" Fourth year: "For heaven's sake, stop sneezing. What are you trying to give me --- pneumonia?"

On the other hand, I know someone who often says, "Many years ago I met a girl, slender, perhaps a hundred and ten pounds. Some said she was beautiful ~ but I could not tell. For, you see, I was in love. Now, after four children and four decades she might be a bit slower and graying. Some say she is changing. I cannot tell, you see, I am in love!"

There is no substitute for love and romance in marriage, neither for the constant and conscious showing of affection. Most of us crave it whether we are able to admit it or not. Our children need our outward displays of affection as well. We never outgrow that need. No one is ever too old to be held and loved.

What makes a couple one flesh when they marry is not really flesh, but it is spirit. It is an act of commitment. We become truly one, not only when our spirits unite, but also when the peace of mind and heart that Christ gives are part of our love and devotion for one another.

Relationships blossom when we are conscious of God's presence, when we have made the peace of mind and heart that Christ gives part of our innermost selves. This remains true in whatever relationship we are with other people! Then our friendship and love become sincere and real, with the result that our relationships are enhanced with stability and peace, love and laughter.

Yesterday, right here in our Church, a couple came to renew their wedding vows in the presence of their family and friends. They first got married two years ago, in a hurry, just before he was sent to war in Iraq for the first time. He is now home for two weeks and will go back for a second tour in Iraq on Tuesday, Valentine's Day. He came in full uniform and they renewed and exchanged their vows. I have a copy of the vows that he wrote while still far away. This is part of what he promised, just yesterday, "No one has ever made me feel as loved as you do, nor has anyone ever taken my breath away as you do ~ every time I look into your eyes. I love you with every beat of my heart and with every cell in my body and will stand up and defend you until my last breath. Have this ring as a token of my never-ending love for you." In a merciless war zone, maybe in a foxhole, our young friend discovered the deepest meaning and value of romance, love and a lasting relationship.

It reminds us of the love that Jesus felt, just before Calvary, when he said: "I am leaving you with a gift-- Peace of mind and heart! And the peace that I give is not fragile like the peace that the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid!"

We are God's Valentines – after all

AMEN

