

## You can be a person of love

Message for Sunday, December 18, 2016  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Romans 5:6-8; John 3:16

### Children's Message:

A young man wrote this love letter to his girlfriend:

**My dearest, my beloved.**

**I love you with all my heart. You are always on my mind. Nothing can keep me from you.**

**I would climb the highest mountain to see your smile.**

**I would swim the widest ocean to feel your embrace.**

**I would fight through the deepest jungle to hear a word from your lips.**

**I would walk through an Arctic blizzard just to be with you.**

**Yours forever,  
Joe Smith.**

**P.S. I'll come over Saturday night if it doesn't rain.**

If you're the girlfriend, would you believe what he says?

The Bible tells us that God loves us. But God doesn't just say it. He did something to show how much he loves us: he came to Earth and became a human being, one of us: Jesus.

The highest example of love we have is God sending Son Jesus to us. "*God so loved the world...*" Read John 3:16 completely.

God loves us – you and you and you and me. The question now is, will we love God back? Will we follow Jesus?

**Message:** "You can be a person of love"

This fourth Advent candle is called the candle of love. That's what I want to focus on right now.

When Jane and I were going out together before we were married, she came to my place one day for supper. I had planned to clean up a bit before she came, but hadn't gotten around to it.

Now I'm not talking about a few ornaments being out of place on the shelf, or I missed dusting the top shelf of the bookcase. I mean

- clothes scattered on the floor in the bedroom and hall
- dishes from the past week piled next to the sink
- I hadn't vacuumed or swept for the past two months, and it was obvious.

During the evening, as we talked, the subject came up of our different customs. In particular, my standards of cleanliness.

Jane could see for herself that, basically, I was a slob. Yet she still said that she loved me!

It never hit me until the next day, the deeper meaning of this. But then an idea struck me. When I saw Jane after work that day, I said to her, "Jane, you taught me something about God today."

She replied, "How? I didn't even see you today!"

I explained, "I was thinking about last night. You know all about my bad habits that you don't like; yet you still say that you love me. I've been told that's what God's love is like, and now I've experienced it."

God's love is the same as the love that Jane had for me (and still has, I might add; my habits haven't changed much since then!), only more. God loves us no matter what.

God may not like what we do, but his love is constant. It is unconditional love.

Compare this with conditional love, love that is earned. For example, if Jane loved me only because I was so handsome or such a hunk☺, that would be conditional love. Let's go further: if she gave me a hug and a kiss only when I washed the floor, that wouldn't be love at all; that's manipulation. I'm not being loved; I'm being used.

We see the same thing between parents and children. Suppose parents show affection to their children only when they behave well, or only when they get good grades in school. Then these children feel that they are loved only when are good. They live in fear that if they do something bad, their parents may no longer love them or want them.

In order for children to be emotionally healthy, they need unconditional love. It is absolutely essential. They need to know that their parents love them, no matter what.

When your child does something wrong, you discipline them. But after that, you talk to them, look them straight in the eye and say, "I still love you. What you did was very bad, but I still love you. I will always love you, no matter what you do."

As children of God, we need to have that same unconditional love in order for us to grow. And this is exactly what God offers us in Jesus Christ.

**Romans 5:6-8, New Living Translation:**

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

You may be familiar with John 3:16, the Bible verse which begins "God so loved the world..." Why did God so love the world? because people were so good? No! There was greed, corruption, war, just the same as today. God loved them, and us, unconditionally. So great is his love "...that he gave his only begotten Son...."

When we are assured of God's love in Christ Jesus, then we don't have to work to earn that love. You don't have to do all kinds of good deeds to impress God. You do good because you know what it feels like when someone loves you, and you want to share that feeling with someone else. You help others because it feels fantastic to pass on love to others.

Jesus talked a lot about love. He said that our lives are to be modelled on his example of unconditional love:

**John 15:12-13, New International Version:**

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

He tells us this unconditional love has no limits, no conditions:

**Mark 12:31, New International Version:**

"Love your neighbour as yourself."

**Matthew 5:43, New International Version:**

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...."

Most of the people around Jesus thought of him as a rabbi, that is, a teacher. By tradition, he should have spent his time deciding cases of law.

But Jesus kept talking about love, and people found that very irritating. They wanted him to be a legal interpreter, and they kept bringing cases for him to judge.

- Rabbi, this man's oxen fell into a ditch on the Sabbath; we want to know if he may pull them out?
- Rabbi, are we obliged to pay taxes to Rome?
- Rabbi, we have caught this woman in the sin of adultery, and the Law says that she should be stoned. What do you say, Rabbi?

And Jesus kept telling them that this kind of microscopic attention to the letter of the law was wrong. "Don't worry," he said, "I have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it." Jesus did this by elevating the whole law into one great commandment: LOVE!

What about us? How do we love? Reluctantly? Only with those who love us back? What about those we don't like? Maybe someone who has hurt you. Jesus says to love them, too. No conditions!

Let me tell a story which shows us how this kind of love can open doors and do wonders.

John Powell is a Jesuit priest, and a professor at Loyalist University in Chicago. He teaches a course called "Theology and Faith" for general students, not just for people studying to be priests. One year he had a student named Tommy who was a real rebel. He had hair halfway down his back. Anything John said about God, Tommy disagreed with. Tommy thought the whole idea of religion was a bunch of baloney.

On the last day of the course, Tommy asked, "So, Prof, do you think I'll ever find God?" John replied,

“No, Tommy, I don’t think you’ll ever find God.” But just before Tommy stepped out the door, John added, “But I’m sure that God will find you!”

John was relieved to be finished with Tommy; it had been a trying year. But two years later, there was a knock on the door. In walks Tommy, looking very different this time. His hair was all gone. Radiation treatments for his cancer had made it fall out. The cancer had only grown larger.

Tommy told his story:

When I found I had cancer, I got mad. I cursed at the doctors, I cursed myself, I cursed at my folks, I cursed at God. I started banging on the doors of heaven, demanding that God come out and explain why I was dying. But there was no answer. It was as if there was no one home.

Rather than just feel sorry for myself, I decided I would do something worthwhile with my final days. I went home to see my folks again, this time to say, ‘Thank-you.’

I began with the hardest one: my Dad. He was reading the newspaper when I approached him.

“Dad...”

“Yes, what is it?” he asked, without lowering the newspaper.

“Dad, I would like to talk with you.”

“Well, talk.”

“I mean.... It’s really important.”

The newspaper came down so that his eyes peered over the top. “What is it?”

“Dad, I love you. I just wanted you to know that.”

(Tommy smiled as he relived the moment.) The newspaper fluttered to the floor. Then my father did two things I could never remember his ever doing before. He cried, and he hugged me. And we talked all night, even though he had to go to work the next morning.

“It was easier with my mother and my brother. We all shared the things we had been keeping secret for so many years. I was sorry only that I had waited so long to be open with the people I am so close to.”

“Then one day I turned around and God was there. We had a good talk, too.”

Do you see the connection? It was only after Tommy shared his love for his family, that the door to God opened up.

Sometimes it works the other way: you may have cut someone out of your life. Then, when you begin receiving and sharing God’s love, you will find that you want to be reconciled with that other person. The door which was once shut, suddenly swings open.

That’s the power of unconditional love, God’s kind of love. The 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of John 4:16 puts it this way: “God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.”

### Next Steps:

- Receive God’s love. Soak in it. Let God fill you to overflowing with his love for you.
- Then pass it on to someone else! As it says in 1 John 3:18, “in sincerity and practice.”