

The church is a place of caring

Message for Sunday, February 5, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: John 13:34-35

Children's Message: John 15:12-14

Is there someone in your life who loves you? How do you know they love you? *All kinds of answers, being kind, helpful, etc.*

Do you have a teddy bear? Do you sleep with it? Do you take it places? Do you love your teddy bear?

Here is a teddy bear. Look, this teddy bear has its arms open, ready for a hug! *Give the teddy bear a big hug; let it wrap its arms around my neck.*

Teddy bears are very loving, aren't they? Can you show me, how does a teddy bear hold its arms? *Let them show me.* Right, a teddy bear has its arms open; it's always ready for a hug. It's always ready to give some love.

Have you ever seen a teddy bear that looks like this?—*fold my arms tightly across my chest, put on a frown.* If a teddy bear looked like that, would it be ready to hug? Am I ready to hug? No! That's not love.

Love is being open, ready to reach out to someone. Would any of you like a hug from a teddy bear? ¹

Sermon “The church is a place of caring”
The Vestibules are a comedy group from Montreal, and they're hilarious. I heard them do a parody of *K-Tel*, the company that used to advertise on television back in the 1970s. It sort of went like this... [turn on “*K-Tel* announcer” voice].

Do you have a product to sell, but can't get stores to put it on their shelves? Why not bypass the middleman, and sell directly to your customers? We've perfected the technique, and we can show you how.

We're K-Tel, and we're the people who invented direct selling through television! You can buy our marketing kit which is guaranteed to sell your product! It tells you:

- How to use *emphasis* to make your announcement sound *really* important!!
- The importance of repetition so people won't forget your product!
- That's right, we'll teach you the importance of repetition so people won't forget your product!
- How to add a bonus so people will think they're getting a real bargain!

Call right now and we'll include copies of our best ads ever! Call right now: 1-800-555-1212! You get all this for only \$49.95! That's right: only \$49.95! Call 1-800-555-1212! That's 1-800-555-1212!

One thing has never changed: if you want people to remember something, you need to repeat it. Often when Jesus was going to say something very important, he would preface it with, “Truly, truly, I say to you...”

And very, very rarely in the Bible is something repeated the third time in the same passage. Today we're looking at one of those passages.

Love one another, care for one another, help, serve...

John 13:34-35, Today's English Version:

And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

That is the beginning of *many, many* passages in the Bible which tell Christians to love one another. There are 16 other passages which repeat this commandment of Jesus. Obviously, this is very important!

That's why caring for one another forms a key part of our Mission Statement. It's the underlined section below:

ST. PAUL'S MISSION STATEMENT, part 1:
We are called to be children of God, living in a faith family that supports each other, the communities in which we live, and the world.

There are three things we should note here:

- Jesus is talking about love for other Christians within the church. Loving other people is also important, and we'll come to that next week.

¹ Idea for this from Bucky Dann, a Methodist pastor in New York.

But for now the focus is on how we treat one another in the church.

- We are to love one another as Jesus loved. What was that like? He loved **unselfishly**, without wondering what he was going to get out of it. He loved **sacrificially**, without limits on how far he would go for someone else. He loved **forgivingly**, not keeping track of whether the disciples were worthy of his love.
- Jesus said that one way the church is guaranteed to have an impact on people is for it to be a place of love. People in the world are hungry for genuine love, meaningful relationships.

But that's not all. Other New Testament writers expanded on this theme of loving one another. I did a study of the Bible and found, beyond the 17 passages already mentioned, another 38 passages that tell us to care for one another. That's a total of 55 places in the Bible where Christians are specifically told to love and care for one another in the church!! [See appendix at end for the full list.]

Here are just a few of them:

Romans 12:16, New International Version:
Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Romans 15:7, New International Version:
Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Ephesians 4:32, New King James Version:
Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Philippians 2:4, Today's English Version:
Look out for one another's interests, not just for your own.

1 Thessalonians 5:13, New Century Version:
Respect [your leaders and teachers] with a very special love because of the work they do. Live in peace with each other.

James 5:16, Today's English Version:
So then, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.

1 Peter 5:5, Today's English Version:
All of you must put on the apron of humility, to serve one another.

Next Steps: Putting love into practice

a) Love is a decision

Love is a decision. It means making a choice. What kind of life am I going to live? What principles will guide my life? Choosing to love is *not* a matter of feeling in love, or liking someone. It is a decision.

Let me be specific. Do you like everyone in church? Come on, be honest now. Aren't there some people that you find a little irritating at times? They may be fine people, but they're just not *your* kind of people.

I've got good news for you: you don't have to like everyone! The Bible never tells us that. That's a good thing, too, because liking someone is an emotional reaction; you don't have much control over it.

But loving someone is a *decision*.

Here's the secret! Even if you don't feel warm towards someone, act as if you do! Be polite. Give praise. Bake cookies for a surprise present. As you do acts of love, an amazing thing will happen: you will find yourself beginning to feel warmth for that person.

Here's another idea: If you're mad at someone, pray for that person, that all sorts of good things will come to that person. You will quickly find that it's impossible to stay mad at someone that your are praying for.

b) Love means accepting one another

Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians commanded to spend their time and energy trying to reach 100% agreement on every issue. What it does say, though, is to accept one another.

Romans 15:7, New International Version:
Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

One of the signs of a healthy church is that you can openly disagree, and yet still respect one another as sisters and brothers in Christ.

c) Love means taking time for people

Time is precious. Taking time to be with someone tells them that they are precious, they are loved.

Ron is a teacher who became president of a Christian college. He was raised by a single mom, who did her best. They went to church, but it meant nothing to Ron, until he was in grade five. That year his Sunday School teacher called him one Friday evening: “Ron, I’m going fishing tomorrow and I’ve got an extra rod. If fishing interests you, I’d love to have you come along.” Ron felt like a real person, important enough to be chosen over all the adult men his teacher might have invited instead.

Out on the lake, Ron’s new hero lit up a cigarette, while patiently instructing him in the basics of fishing. After they had caught a few fish, the teacher told Ron about his life, especially what had happened since he had met Jesus Christ. Ron learned how important Jesus was to his teacher. That teacher was really fishing for a boy that morning, for that was the day that Ron asked Jesus Christ to be his Saviour. He thus began his own lifetime of adventure with the Lord.

When Ron tells the story, he smiles as he mentions that if the elders of his rather strict church had known that his teacher smoked, they would have disqualified him from leading a class. But this man was the only person in the church who cared enough to invest time in Ron and speak to him about his relationship with Jesus Christ. It was through this experience that Ron grew from thinking that he was “not much worth to anyone” to “a person of great value with a purpose and a future.”

When you take time for someone, you are telling that person, “I care about you.”

d) Love means caring in the little things

It’s often the little acts of kindness that make a house into home; than make a group of biologically-related individuals into a family. “Please” and “thank-you” still work wonders. It’s a mystery to me why some families are more courteous to strangers than they are to each other.

We need to look for opportunities at church to build up others, encourage them. Little things like a

phone call, having lunch together, a card in the mail show that we care.

e) Love means listening to people \emptyset really listening

Sometimes people are afraid to reach out to someone in need. Why afraid? The most common reason is, “I don’t know what to say.” Let me tell you something very, very important: the key to communication, to showing that you really care about someone, is listening.

One woman was fed up with the superficial level of communication in her church, so she conducted an experiment. To everyone who asked her, while passing in the hallways, “How are you?” she replied, “Lousy!” Some didn’t even hear what she said. Some said, “I’m sorry to hear that,” but no one asked her what was the matter. In other words, they weren’t *really* listening to her; they didn’t really care.

f) Love means reaching out to those on the outside

Every Sunday when someone comes to visit this church, they are looking for a caring family. They are asking themselves, “Will I be accepted here? Will there be room for me to fit in? Will there be someone who will reach out and love me?”

I want to be this to be the place where they will find it. Don’t you?

In all these different types of caring, just imagine how it would feel to be the one receiving that kind of love. Wouldn’t that feel great?

Just as great is when you are the one giving the love.

APPENDIX

Here are the 17 places in the New Testament where we are commanded to “love one another.”

John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17

Romans 12:10; 13:8

1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9

Hebrews 13:1

1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 4:8

1 John 3:11, 14; 3:23; 4:7, 11-12

2 John 1:5.

Here are the 38 places in the New Testament where we are commanded to “*verb* one another.” I put them into categories.

a) Peace with one another (5 passages)

Mark 9:50, Today’s English Version:

“Have the salt of friendship among yourselves, and live in peace with one another.”

Romans 16:16, Today’s English Version:

Greet one another with the kiss of peace. All the churches of Christ send you their greetings.

1 Corinthians 16:20, Today’s English Version:

All the believers here send greetings. Greet one another with the kiss of peace.

2 Corinthians 13:12, Today’s English Version:

Greet one another with the kiss of peace.

1 Thessalonians 5:13, New Century Version:

Respect [your leaders and teachers] with a very special love because of the work they do. Live in peace with each other.

b) Live in harmony with one another (6 passages)

Romans 12:16, New International Version:

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Romans 15:5, New Revised Standard Version:

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:10, New International Version:

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so

that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Ephesians 4:2, Today’s English Version:

Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another.

Philippians 2:2, New Living Translation:

Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one heart and purpose.

1 Peter 3:8, New International Version:

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another: be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

c) Help and encourage one another (8 passages)

Romans 14:19, Today’s English Version:

So then, we must always aim at those things that bring peace and that help strengthen one another.

Galatians 6:2, New Revised Standard Version:

Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Philippians 2:4, Today’s English Version:

Look out for one another’s interests, not just for your own.

1 Thessalonians 4:18, Today’s English Version:

So then, encourage one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:11, Today’s English Version:

And so encourage one another and help one another, just as you are now doing.

Hebrews 3:13, Contemporary English Version:

You must encourage one another each day. And you must keep on while there is still a time that can be called “today.” If you don’t, then sin may fool some of you and make you stubborn.

Hebrews 10:24-25, New International Version:

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another— and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 13:16, Today’s English Version:

Do not forget to do good and to help one another, because these are the sacrifices that please God.

d) Be humble with, and learn from one another (8 passages)

John 13:14, New Revised Standard Version:
So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

Romans 15:7, New International Version:
Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Romans 15:14, New Revised Standard Version:
I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.

Galatians 5:13, Today's English Version:
My friends, you were called to be free. But do not let this freedom become an excuse for letting your physical desires control you. Instead, let love make you serve one another.

Ephesians 5:21, New International Version:
Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Philippians 2:3, Today's English Version:
Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves.

Colossians 3:16, Today's English Version:
Christ's message in all its richness must live in your hearts. Teach and instruct one another with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts.

1 Peter 5:5, Today's English Version:
In the same way you younger people must submit yourselves to your elders. And all of you must put on the apron of humility, to serve one another; for the scripture says, "God resists the proud, but shows favour to the humble."

e) Care for one another, in various ways (11 passages)

1 Corinthians 11:33, Today's English Version:
So then, my friends, when you gather together to eat the Lord's Supper, wait for one another.

1 Corinthians 12:25, Today's English Version:
There is no division in the body, but all its different parts have the same concern for one another.

Ephesians 4:32, New King James Version:
Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 5:19, New International Version:
Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.

Colossians 3:13, Today's English Version:
Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you.

1 Thessalonians 5:15, Today's English Version:
See that no one pays back wrong for wrong, but at all times make it your aim to do good to one another and to all people.

James 5:16, Today's English Version:
So then, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you will be healed. The prayer of a good person has a powerful effect.

1 Peter 4:9-10, New Revised Standard Version:
Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

1 Peter 5:14, Today's English Version:
Greet one another with the kiss of Christian love.

1 John 1:7, Today's English Version:
But if we live in the light — just as he is in the light — then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin.

1 John 3:16, New Revised Standard Version:
We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us — and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.