

# The church reaches out with love to others

Message for Sunday, February 12, 2017  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Matthew 22:36-40

## Children's Message:

Romans 12:9, New Living Translation:

Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them.

(and the verses after that give practical examples of how to love others)

Jesus calls us to love others — really love them, not just talk about it. Fake love is just talk and no action. Real love is practical. It takes time; it takes effort.

You may know of Garfield, the world famous cat. In one cartoon, Garfield is seated in a comfortable chair, and sees his friend Odie outside at the window peering in eagerly. Garfield says to himself, "Poor Odie. Locked outside in the cold. I just can't bear to see him like this. I gotta do something." So Garfield gets up from his chair and closes the curtains!

That took effort, all right. But was it love? What would love look like in that situation? *Listen to responses.* What would love look like in your situation? *Listen to responses.*

We just sang about this, in the song "Magic Penny." I like that line, "Love is something if you give it away, you end up having more."

**Message** "The church reaches out with love to others"

## 1) The Church reaches out with love

Someone asked Jesus which is the greatest commandment. This was his answer.

Matthew 22:36-40, New International Version:  
Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Jesus wants us to go out and love other people. Someone might respond, "Ho hum. So tell me something I didn't already know." But that's just it: it's one thing to know something, and another thing to actually do it.

Tony Campolo tells about a young woman who made a commitment of her life to Christ, but was still depressed and bored. She went to a psychotherapist for help, but after several sessions with her, felt that the effort was futile. Then one day she came into her therapist's office with her face radiant with excitement.

"I've had the most wonderful day," she said. "This morning I could not get my car started, so I called the pastor and asked him if he could drive me into town to my appointment with you. He said he would, but on the way he had to stop by the hospital and make a few calls. I went with him and while he was busy, I visited some elderly people in one of the wards. I read from the Bible and prayed with them. By the time the morning was over, I was higher than a kite. I haven't felt this good in years."

The therapist quickly responded, "Now we know how to make you happy! Our problem is solved! We know how to keep you out of the doldrums!"

Much to her surprise, the young woman answered, "You don't expect me to keep on doing this sort of thing, do you?"

She knew the solution to her problems. She knew how much satisfaction she received in meeting the needs of others, but still she resisted. I can see a lot of myself in there; you probably can, too.

The church is a group of people who, following the commandment of their Lord Jesus Christ, focus as much attention on meeting the needs of others as we do on ourselves. We've made this commandment part of our Mission Statement:

**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.**

Last week we looked at the "each other" part. Today we're looking beyond the circle of our church family to others in the community and the world.

## 2) We have to work at reaching out with love

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness before he began his ministry [Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13]. He was tempted:

- to use his divine powers to turn stone into bread, because he was hungry
- to have all the power and wealth of the world, in exchange for worshipping the devil
- to jump off the peak of the Temple and make the angels rescue him, just to prove that he is God's son.

In each case, the temptation was for Jesus to focus his desire and his will inwardly upon himself. Make bread to satisfy *his* hunger. Have all the power and wealth for *himself*. Show off how great *he* is.

I think we can say that the essence of temptation is to focus on ourselves. In fact, this is what sin is: turning away from God, setting up ourselves instead as Lord.

It is very easy for us in the church to fall into that temptation: focussing on ourselves, our needs.

One example of this is when churches expend enormous amounts of time and energy trying to raise enough money to pay the bills, and there is no time or energy left over to look outside and help with the needs of the community. This is not just an issue with small churches. I remember hearing the pastor of one of those megachurches say, "I feel such tremendous pressure. It's like there are 50 people whose jobs depend on me putting on a great show each Sunday."

## 3) We reach out with practical love to meet people's needs

Love is an attitude which is focussed on meeting the needs of other people. Here is an example.

Many of us are afraid of dogs. It is a common fear. The great scientist Louis Pasteur was frightened of dogs, but far more than most people. He was *terrified* of dogs. Even the sound of a bark far off in the distance would cause him to tremble with fear. The root of this came on a day when he was a young boy. A rabid wolf had raged through his

village, attacking many of his neighbours. Those who were not killed immediately died a lingering, painful death over the next two weeks. Time and again Pasteur said, "I have always been haunted by the cries of those victims."

Yet in 1882, when he was past the age of 60, Pasteur gave up all his other studies in an intense search for a cure for rabies. For three long years, in spite of his deep-seated fears, he risked his life by living with mad dogs. At last he came through with a vaccine to cure the victims of rabies. On a night in July of 1885, he tried the first injection on a little boy whose life seemed doomed. The boy lived. The memory of the agony of his neighbours spurred Louis Pasteur to find a cure for this dreaded disease.

Love is more than a warm feeling. Love is a verb. It is *attitude in action*. Love seeks to serve others, meeting their needs.

What are the needs in our community? All kinds of needs! There are dozens of kinds of ministry we could provide for people. Here are just a few ideas:

- Visiting people in the hospital, or shut-ins at home;
- Helping children with schoolwork, especially in the late afternoon before parents get home;
- A team of men that would get together once a month on Saturdays, and do renovations or repairs to the home of someone who is unable to do it.
- Financial counselling for people in trouble with debt;
- Community kitchen – teaching good nutrition while making a week's worth of meals together;
- A really big dream would be renovate one of the vacant schools into seniors apartments, so people wouldn't have to leave town when they can no longer manage a house and yard.

The key question here is "What does our community need?" Lawndale Community Church in Chicago was wondering how they could reach out to people in the neighbourhood. They imagined big projects like low income housing, a recreation centre, or a health clinic. But as they listened to people in the neighbourhood, they heard people saying that their greatest need was a safe place to do their laundry! So the church installed washers and

dryers, and opened a laundromat. People flocked to that church, and they liked what they found.

#### 4) We reach out with the Gospel of love

Every now and then I hear a report on the news of someone who has won millions in some lottery, and whose life has been made worse rather than better. It's usually because of conflict over the money with family and friends. Someone figures the new millionaire should share some money, and of course the millionaire wants to keep it all to herself or himself. The result is bitterness, envy and hard feelings all around.

In a sense, you and I are the new millionaires. In Jesus Christ, we have found the key to life that so many people are searching for. If we keep it to ourselves, we're being just as selfish as the lottery winner.

People say they don't talk about religion, it just causes arguments. I agree. *Don't* talk about religion when you want to invite someone to church. Talk about yourself. Talk about what has happened in your life since you decided to follow Jesus Christ. I know it's scary to talk about this, because it's so personal, so private. But Jesus calls us to be his witnesses. The church which is scared to witness is the church that will eventually, *inevitably* die.

Instead of death, choose life. The key to having a full life is to give it away. You know the old song: "Love is something if you give it away, you end up having more." It's absolutely true.

Who are you going to love this week, in the name of Jesus Christ?

#### Next Steps:

- Experience God's love. Know the peace of being forgiven, the joy of having a companion through all the turmoil of life. That's the key to having love to give to others.
- Pray. Ask for wisdom to know what to do; then ask for courage to do it.
- Talk with others. Share your ideas, plan together, get excited!
- Do it.