

Stop Talking

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

This text reminds me of when I was in high school. I was a theatre kid, and I was in numerous different musicals. But of all the musicals, one stands out among all of them as my favorite, and I think many people share this same sentiment. I had the pleasure of being in the play *Les Miserables*, which in English means, “wretched”. If you are not familiar with the story, it is a story set in 19th century France. Where the nation was in a state of serious economic turmoil, the rich did not care about the poor, as plagues ravaged the land, and people were dying at extremely high rates. The story of a criminal, who throughout his whole life seeks to redeem himself from a dark past, who seeks forgiveness from the things he has done.

Throughout the entire story, the main character displays many different acts of love as he strives to redeem himself, and pay for the wrong he has done. His story takes place amongst many people who fight for each other, helping each other stay alive, as they struggle to live, their love for one another drives them even to death. This epic drama, surrounding the main character, and his struggle from redemption and forgiveness, which concludes at his death bed.

Where he makes a confession, and leaves everyone with these last words, “to love another person, is to see the face of God.” What profound words.

“To love another person is to see the face of God.” But how do we love? How do we show people the face of God? Love is an interesting thing. We hear the word thrown around a lot these days. Used in many different contexts. We use it interchangeably with other words that do not quite actually mean love. We are infatuated with talking about love. We have television shows that set one person out on a quest for love. We talk about loving this, and loving that. Loving this person, and loving that person. Love, love, love! Love has been perverted and distorted by our sinful nature. So that this love talk has turned into empty words void of any meaning. We enjoy, talking about love. But, we find it much harder to act in love.

It is hard for us to act in love, because we are the wretched. We are completely sinful. We cannot act in love because everything we want and do revolves around us. We are broken people, who do not show people love. We do the opposite, we often hurt people with our words, belittling them, we sin against them in numerous and terrible ways. We gossip, and poke fun at people when they are not around. We hurt people with our actions, and inactions. Everything we do, even our so called acts of love, are for us. It makes us feel better, it looks good to our neighbors who see us doing them, it helps us feel closer to God. It is a way to redeem ourselves, to earn God’s forgiveness. We want to earn our own redemption; we want to save ourselves. But... we can’t. It comes down to the fact, that we are wretched sinners.

John gives us a definition of love. One that is concrete and real. “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us...” Love is a face. Love is a name. Love is Jesus Christ, the Son of

God. Love is an action. Love is God sending his Son for us. Love is Jesus hanging dead on a cross. In order for us to truly know love, and for us to truly understand what love looks like, what it means to love, we need to know Jesus. For Jesus did not only speak about what love is, he showed it, he set the standard, by dying on the cross. As John writes in our text **“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”** Jesus did what we cannot do. Jesus showed us the face of God, and His great love for us.

Jesus’ love for us, was so great, so pure, and so real, that it led him to willingly die on the cross for us. Fulfilling what the meaning of love is, just as he spoke to his disciples in the Gospel of John, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus did not have to die for us, if he didn’t want to. He did not need to suffer the pain, and the separation from God on the cross, but it was his love that drove him to act. It is Christ’s love that also drives us to act.

Christ and his death have set us free from the chains of sin, and death. He has freed us from serving, and doing good works out of obligation. He has freed us, that we do not need to do anything! But being free... Being saved, and being redeemed. We are free to love our neighbor. We have been freed to serve them joyfully, and without consequence. We show the love of Christ by reflecting his love not only in our words, but more importantly by our actions...by being the face of God. As we read in our text earlier, and I echo, “Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.” Let us not love in word or talk... but in deed and truth. Deed and truth. We don’t like to talk about our deeds in the Lutheran church, it makes us uncomfortable!

But even Martin Luther said that Christians are “Little Christs.” Just as God has come to our aid, and has saved us, we also go and be Christ to every one we meet. When we serve and act in love towards our neighbor, because of Christ’s love, we are Christ to them. When we act we share this love of God, this good news with everyone we meet. As Christians, we are not called to talk about serving in love, but we are called to actually serve in love. Just as Christ is the face of God, when we serve as Christ served.... We too are the face of God.

It isn’t by any means easy. We all find ourselves doing similar things, for example. Ever since we moved to North Carolina, I have been telling Kara that I should run more. That I need to eat better, that I need to live healthier. But since we have been here, I have said that a couple times a week, and I still have yet to do so. I talk about it, but never act on it. I look at healthy recipes, and work out plans, but continue to go to Taco Bell. All talk... No action.

It is time for us to stop talking. It is time for us to start acting, loving not in word or talk, but in work and deed. It does not need to be something grand, or flashy. It does not need to be something that gains attention, or prestige. Something as simple as this... Instead of telling someone you will pray for them... Actually pray for them, stop what you are doing and pray with them. When you see that person on the side of the street who needs help... Don’t drive by and talk about how bad you feel for them... offer to buy them food, or help. Instead of talking about going to Lumberton, or helping with brown bag, or getting involved here at Hope. Actually, walk out those doors, and get involved. Sign up for something. Take a day, and serve! Act! Love!

So go! Stop talking, and act in love in the freedom of Christ. Go and be Christ to everyone you meet this week. Share with them the joy that he has brought in your life, don't just talk about it, show it, live it, and act it. Go here, with the peace and joy of Christ, and love in work and deed. Go, and "love another person, and be the face of God..."

Amen.