

**Transparent Love – a sermon by Gary R. Hindman, FPCUC.
Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40.**

Text: “And a second is like it...” --Matthew 22:39

Tim was quietly reading when his wife, Michelle, appeared in the living room with an announcement: “We have to talk,” she said, in a voice that made Tim know she was clearly disturbed.

He set down the book as Michelle produced a piece of paper with some scribbling on it. “We have a problem,” she said. “I took this from Timmy’s pants pocket before I washed his jeans.” “What is it?” Tim asked. “Well, you just read it for yourself,” she said.

Tim unfolded the piece of paper and in his 9-year-old son’s handwriting, in big letters, was this: “Call 1-800-FOR-BABE.” Suddenly, Tim realized his wife’s concern. “Maybe someone at school gave it to Timmy as a joke,” he said. Certainly he was too young to be interested in such things. But try as he might, Tim could not shake himself from thinking that his son might have used that phone number and so, the parents decided they should confront their son ASAP and get to the bottom of this issue.

After supper Tim and Michelle called their son into the family room and produced the note. “What is this all about?” his mother asked. “It’s for dad,” said Timmy in a very calm voice. Both parents blurted out at the same time: “For Dad?”

“What could you possibly mean by that?” asked Michelle as she gave her husband a side-ways glance.

“Well, you know how much Dad likes to fish.” I was watching this TV program, the one with the bass fisherman that Dad really likes? And at the end of the show there was an advertisement for information about all the fishing hot spots. Then Babe Winkleman came on and said, if we want a list of his favorite places to fish, we should call 1-800-FOR-BABE. So, here it is, Dad, just for you!

Things are not always what they seem. In a San Francisco neighborhood, a pastor noticed a young woman struggling to push a baby carriage up a steep hill. He introduced himself and offered to help her up the hill and she gratefully accepted his help. When they reached the place of her apartment the winded pastor said, “Wow, that was a mighty unwieldy baby carriage. Mind if I look in and see your precious cargo?” “O, mercy me,” said the young woman, “there is no baby in there. I was just using the baby carriage to carry home a couple of six-packs of beer for my husband!” Things are not always what they seem!

Our subject this morning is transparent love. But is our love of God, of Christ, of neighbor, transparent? How many people could look at our lives and know that the Lord Jesus gave us two over-arching commandments that we are to follow:

we are to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart, soul, strength and mind; and we are to love our neighbor as our self. To be a follower of Jesus we are to live out those two commands, but how apparent would that be to others? I wonder, do our neighbors see in us love of God and love of others?

Instead of trying to answer that question just now, it might be wiser to think about love—what it is and what it is not. There is lots of confusion out there about the word “love.” It is often a substitute for “like”. “I love my new car,” really means I like it a great deal. And some people say “I love you,” when they really mean, “I need you.” What are some qualities of love? Let’s think about love and I will offer some of my opinions about it.

First, love is a learned behavior. Love is a learned behavior, we are not born loving. In his book *The Immense Journey* cultural anthropologist Loren Eiseley talks about the human hand—how the thumb works in tandem with the fingers to allow us to handle and grasp things. Touch a baby in the palm of the hand and the hand will begin to close and grasp. A baby is a beautiful miracle of God and, at the same time, a bundle of unmet needs. A baby is cute, cuddly and loveable, but not loving; that has to come later!

My nephew, Robert Hindman, is a really neat guy. A Cal-Berkeley grad, he is currently in Hong Kong negotiating for the Japanese firm he works for, seeking clients to rent space in what is to be the tallest building in the world, in Shanghai, China. Bob is kind, considerate, refined and polite but it was not always so.

35 years ago, when Bob was going through his “terrible twos”, he had a way of controlling his parents. When he wanted something at the dinner table he would point in the general direction and raise his little voice saying, “Do, do, do, do!” And his loving parents would say, “What do you want, Bobby? Potatoes, more gravy, meat, jello?” And when they said what he was after, he would just increase the volume. I wondered at the time if he would ever learn to speak the English language! And here he is now, fluent in English and Japanese! But somewhere, along the way, Bob, like most of us, learned not just to take but to give, not just to grasp but to share. Mature people learn the joy of giving as well as receiving love. It is learned behavior that is usually passed on from one person to the next, often from parent to child.

Love is learned behavior but where does it originate? The Bible gives us a clear answer: Love is learned behavior, learned from God. First John, 4:19 says it plainly: “We love because he first loved us.”

Love is something we learn.

Second, love is something we do.

In Barbara and Dennis Raney’s book *Moments Together for Couples*, they tell about a group known as “The Men of the titanic.” It was a group of men from a church in Ohio who wanted to demonstrate their love for their wives so they named themselves after the men who sacrificed their lives so that their wives

and children could board the lifeboats as the great liner sank in the waters of the cold Atlantic in 1912.

For six months they planned an incredible evening that began with hand-written invitations to a special event. The women were picked up in limousines and escorted to a banquet hall decorated with nautical themes. A corsage was set at the place-setting of each wife. The men took training on how to serve a six-course meal replicating the one served on the Titanic that last night. The ship's bell signaled the end of each course. When the men cleared the tables they sang love songs between courses. After the meal, one man stood up and announced that a letter had been found floating in the debris of the Titanic and was now being read for the first time. It was a wonderful love letter full of praise and affection for his wife. Then, he announced that it was, in fact his own letter which he had composed for his wife, after which each man presented his wife with a love letter from their own hand. The pastor of the church who had been one of the men honoring their wives later said, "There was something very sacred about the entire evening. It was a celebration that our wives are a gift from God to us."

I know I am in trouble for telling this story. My wife will be saying, "It's about time you did something like this, too!" And she's right! But the point to the story is that love is something we do. Jesus did not speak of love in the abstract but in the concrete. "Love your neighbor as your self," he said. This he said to a group of Pharisees who were less interested in the spirit of religion or the heart of faith or true love than they were laws and rules for they were content to talk about love instead of living a life of love.

Love is something we learn.

Love is something we do.

Finally, love is the hope the world needs. All over the face of the earth we see strife and trouble. Nations are filled with hatred and ideologies and religions threaten to bring down any hope of a prosperous tomorrow. We have started to get used to suicide bombers and stories of genocide. If we do not learn to love the way Jesus taught, we could be engulfed by our animosity. That is why we need the radical love of Jesus—a love that cuts across racial, cultural, national, economic, social and gender lines. Fortunately, there are people in the world that "get it" and express the love of Christ in inspiring ways.

Peter van Woerden is not as well known as his famous aunt, Corrie ten Boom, and yet his is a story of love and courage—a story of love that came back to bless him in an amazing way.

During the Nazi occupation of Holland, Peter transported a great number of Jewish children to safety under the cover of darkness. They were put in secret hiding places until the war was over. But in doing this work he was eventually caught and put into prison. He survived prison and after the war he and his musical family traveled around Europe and Israel, singing and witnessing to the Lord. It was while he was in Jerusalem that he had a massive heart attack and

was rushed to the hospital. The doctor on duty that day is credited with saving his life.

After Peter had recuperated he was expressing his gratitude to the medical staff and somehow, the subject of the Holocaust came up. Suddenly, the doctor who had saved his life, burst into tears, as did Peter. They began to compare notes and they figured out that the good doctor was one of those children whom Peter had rescued. Now, years later, the hope-filled love he had shown a vulnerable child, was returned to him in the form of the doctor who had saved his life! Love blesses us sometimes in surprising ways!

Love. It is a learned behavior; it is more than words, it is something we do; and when we act in the spirit of Christ, it becomes the hope the world truly needs.

I doubt any of us is doing as much as we should to live the life of love as Christ taught it. Would it not be a marvelous thing if it could be said of us what was said of Christians of the Early Church? "See how those Christians love one another!"

Things are not always what they seem. So, if people look at our lives, will they understand that we come from a position of obedience of the commands of Christ? Do we live under his conviction such that others can see in us, our love of God and our love of neighbor? I hope they do for the world, as I see it, really needs a lot of love.