

“Love passionately given!”

Proverbs 3:1–10 and 1 John 4:7–16

Rock and roll is the music of the younger generation or the young at heart. At one time the younger generation listened to the Beatles – they wrote and sang such songs as ‘She loves you’, ‘Can’t buy me love’, ‘All my loving’, ‘And I love her’, ‘Love me do’, and ‘All you need is love’. By now, if you did not already know, today’s sermon is about ‘Love’.

If you wanted to know more about the word ‘love’ and had ‘Googled’ it on Friday, you would have gotten over 9.3 billion hits. Some of the website names were, ilovedogs.com, ilovecheese.com and ilovelucy.com. If you’re looking for a partner there is trueromancedatingservice.com, lovetest.com and matchmaker.com. There’s even a website called, thelovecalculator.com, which claims to give you the odds of your relationship lasting!

The common element in all these sites is that love is seen as something that arises exclusively out of human desire and belonging, solely within the realm of human gratification. Love is created *by* humanity *for* humanity. Many people see it that way.

Several years ago a psychologist named three types of Christmas gift-givers and the characteristics of each. One is the Duty-Gift Giver. This person feels an obligation to buy a gift; it really doesn’t matter what it is, and not a lot of thought goes into it. Anything will do.

The second is the Traditional Gift Giver. This person always chooses something appropriate, like a book for the coffee table. It’s always an acceptable choice but maybe not a really personal gift. It’s nice, sends the right message and it never goes over budget.

The third type of giver is called the Passionate Giver. This person enthusiastically looks for just the right gift for the right person. The giver knows the right colour, the right size, and doesn’t mind going over budget if need be. The gift fits the need or desire of the recipient regardless of budget. The giver is simply happy to give it. Such a gift, naturally, is deeply appreciated by the recipient and elicits the most genuine and heartfelt thanks.

God is a Passionate Giver and the scriptures reveal that to us. “...For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The scriptures proclaim that love is real, genuine and beyond superficial human fancies. We are invited to embrace this love. God’s message for us is clear and profound, God’s love is evident in the very fact that God gave

Jesus as the best expression of that love.

Jesus Christ was the very best gift God had to offer; the gift was given for our sake. This concept of love is what defines us and our relationship with our Lord – that God, motivated by love, gave passionately and extravagantly to us.

Love is the foundation of the fruit of the Spirit: *joy* is love that sings; *peace* is love that rests; *patience* is love that endures; *kindness* is love's touch; *goodness* is love's character; *faithfulness* is love's habit; *self-control* is love holding the reins. It is this love that has the power to transform us and change lives one by one.

"...In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:10-11).

There's a story about two friends bumping into one another on the street one day. One of them looked sad, almost on the verge of tears. His friend asked, "What has the world done to you, my old friend?" The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago an uncle died and left me \$40,000." The friend said, "Wow, that's a lot of money." The sad fellow said, "But two weeks ago a cousin I never even knew died, and left me \$85,000 free and clear." His friend replied, "Sounds like you've been blessed...." The fellow quickly came back, "You don't understand! Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million dollars." Now the friend was really confused. "Then, why do you look so glum?" The guy said, "This week... Nothing!"

Once we lose our sense of gratitude, the gift's meaning is lost and the high price paid for it is forgotten. That's the trouble with receiving something wonderful – we can easily take it for granted and eventually come to expect only good things. This is the "entitlement mindset" that has permeated both our society and the church. We have been blessed to live in a land of plenty, and as a result we have become complacent. Many times we are completely unwilling to give thanks to anyone for anything.

The Gospel message tells us that love's power is the fact that was expressed to the world in a concrete way and that it was given with utmost passion. It isn't connected with the whims of our emotions or gratifications. When our lives are characterized by the awareness of this gift and profound gratitude this gift causes then we become committed to living out that same passionate love in our world as God's agents of change.

What an opportunity we have as followers of Christ to be his instruments of love! It is not enough simply

to cling to an individualistic spirituality and bask in the personal contentment of the idea of God's finished work in our lives as a status symbol. The work of the Lord is far from finished indeed. As the kingdom of heaven is birthed within us here on earth, Christ calls us as his disciples to cultivate the kingdom values of peace, justice, service and the yearning for righteousness in a world that is in want and need of healing. Our Christian path to which we have been called by Christ is one of giving—of our time, talents and resources in showing and sharing the heart and message of our God. Indeed, it can be said that when we stop giving, we stop loving.

What an opportunity we have as members of Gordon Presbyterian Church to join with other congregations in the work of Presbyterian World Service & Development and touch the lives of our brothers and sisters around the world as they strive to build better futures for themselves! In its work, PWS&D joins with faithful and passionate partners worldwide to address real needs through our prayerful and financial support. We have been part of massive relief efforts to help survivors of the Indian Ocean tsunami, the earthquake in Haiti, the flooding in Pakistan and the enormous disaster in Japan. Also we are engaged in sustained development missions in lower-income regions by supporting human rights efforts, protecting the vulnerable, improving health and nutrition, ensuring children receive education and helping to improve the status of women both in the home and community. These are just some of the ways we are able to give of our passionate love.

Of course, this is not always easy because we don't always see the fruits of our labours. But the change we are having in the lives of others through PWS&D is incredible meaningful.

Narmada is just one example of a woman whose life has been forever changed. Living in an impoverished community in rural India, Narmada lost both her parents to illness, and her eldest brother was forced to drop out of school in order to provide for the family. Overcome with grief, Narmada sunk into a deep depression. Every day was a struggle to get by. She described living a dark life without hope. She wanted to die.

A recommendation from her pastor led Narmada to attend a PWS&D-supported community college that changed everything. She began attending classes and received the support she needed to complete her schooling. Through the friendships she made, and with guidance from the college's dedicated and compassionate teachers, Narmada took an interest in the nursing program. Her teachers watched as Narmada's attitude toward life began to change.

Narmada is now a young woman in her early 20s, enrolled in the nursing program. She has learned to cope and thrive. She has big plans to become a psychologist so she can help others who are struggling

with similar difficulties find peace and hope.

Narmada has a new outlook on life and she is incredibly grateful for the strangers from another country that supported her in her journey back to emotional health and into a life with promise. She is just one of the many people who's lives have been touched by our commitment to overcoming poverty and injustice, and empowering people to lead lives with dignity and opportunity.

The church can be an amazing place when it is working the way it's supposed to—when we understand that giving love means treating and serving one another as if each person were Christ himself.

When we begin to live according to our faith commitment with passion and vibrancy for another's sake, then we extend this authentic love in our giving – by sheltering the homeless, strengthening the weak and marginalized, rescuing the wounded, empowering the innocent, honouring all, effecting change in people's lives and thereby establishing God's kingdom on earth.

Glory to our God through Jesus Christ!