

## What It's All About

I preach this morning in the name of God, the Father, the + Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the 14th Sunday after Pentecost and we continue in the Days After Pentecost and our celebration of the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit upon God's one holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. And you and I are a part of this one holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church not because we have made ourselves to be a part of it, but rather because God, in Jesus, by nature of our baptism, has made us to be a part of it. For in the Holy waters of Baptism, God claimed your life from the powers of sin, death, and the devil and He has brought you into His glorious Kingdom, the kingdom of Jesus Christ. He has claimed your life and you are a child of God.

Now today, I want to speak to you about what life is all about. And life is all about loving God and loving one another. Nothing more, nothing less. Today we kick off our stewardship series in the month of September entitled, "Open My Eyes, Lord." And as we do, we are reminded that everything we have in our life and everything we are, everything we do, is contingent upon the way in which we love God and love one another. And that's what our lesson is about today.

So let's take a look: it's Romans chapter 13, verses 8 to 14. And while you're opening there in your Bibles, let me share with you a few things that I brought with me this morning. Now, as you can see, there's the big bucket which we'll call "God's Love." And we also have this little bucket that we'll call, "Our Love." If life is all about loving God and loving one another, our lesson is truly about understanding how we give love and how we receive love.

Now, our love is limited, it's conditional. If I put the sponge into the water in the "Our Love" bucket as far as I can go and then squeeze it into the glass, let's see how far my love will go. I love because I want to get things out of people - I pour

into people because sometimes we want to get certain things out. The sponge is all the way down in the bucket and it looks like the water's almost gone. Wow, that's not very much water! Did it even fill the glass up halfway? I'm not sure it did. My love is gone - it's limited. It's conditional, it's based on conditions. It's "what I can get out of the relationship."

But God's love is unconditional, it's unlimited. If I put the sponge here in the large bucket, "God's Love," and I squeeze it into the glass, God's love is not to get anything from us, but to give everything to us. And it overflows in our life just as this glass is overflowing with the water from "God's Love" bucket. And the purpose of God's love is so that other people can experience His love. He loves us so that we can love other people. But our love, as you can see here, is limited. It's conditional; it's based on what we can enter into the relationship to get out of it. But God's love is eternal, which means that it never goes away. It's unlimited, which is why Paul says that, "love is the fulfillment of the law" (*Romans 13:10*).

So we're in Romans, chapter 13, verse 8, and Paul says, "Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

So first, love is, as Paul said, the fulfillment of the law. Now, it's very interesting here, Paul's use of language, especially concerning the word "debt." For he says in verse 8, "let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another."

You know, over the course of my life my understanding of debt has really changed. Back in 2006, when I was preparing to relocate from Ohio to Virginia Beach to pursue my seminary education, I was in conversation with individuals to receive discernment and wisdom about how to appropriate and understand God's call. But also then how to think through the financial ramifications and obligations that I was taking upon myself as a full-time student.

And at that time, I was told that there is good debt and there's bad debt. And what I was told is that student debt was one of those good debts to have. I believed that until three years after my seminary education when I was left with a bill of sixty thousand dollars and I couldn't pay it back. Not working at the church for fifty dollars a week - living at the church, working two jobs, and then getting a third job - I couldn't pay it back.

And what Solomon said in Proverbs chapter 22, verse 7 is true, that when you are in debt, you are, as a borrower, "a slave to the lender." And how can you serve Jesus if you are a slave to anything else other than Him?

You see, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. Law is the fulfillment, because love is the fulfillment of the Law, and Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. For Jesus, himself, said in Matthew chapter 5, verses 17-18, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." Perfect love casts out all fear because love is the fulfillment of the law.

If Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and if Jesus is love, then love is the fulfillment of the law. And what does this mean for us? And how does this truth have the propensity to change every aspect of our lives? Well, this is what it means for us: that to fulfill love in your life, to love others as God loves you, to live a life of love

is not contingent upon what you do or what you don't do. It's contingent only upon that which God, in Jesus, has already done for you.

And this then positions your heart with a direction to faithfully serve your neighbor, verse 9, "These commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

You see, love is the fulfillment of the law and love is the commitment to the betterment of other people. Love is the fulfillment of the law because Jesus is the fulfillment of the law. And secondly, love is the commitment to the betterment of other people. You see, love is not an emotion; love is not a feeling; love is not an intellectual activity of the mind where you think good thoughts about a person. No, love is a decisive choice; love is a decisive decision; love is a commitment.

I'll never forget the day of my ordination, July 24, 2016, and Bishop John Bradosky said these words to me, "Brian, never forget this: these are God's people and God has called you to love them."

That truth has radically transformed every part of who I am. It has changed me and it continues to change me. Love is not a feeling; love is not an emotion; love is not some intellectual activity of the mind whereby I somehow entertain the thought of thinking good things about people. No, love is a commitment; love is a choice; love is knowing that God loves me and therefore I have the joy and the privilege no matter what I experience, no matter what confrontation comes to me in this life, the joy of the Lord is my strength because I am loved and therefore I can love. I cannot love God's people until I am first loved by Jesus. That has changed me and it continues to change me to this day.

Love is the commitment to the betterment of other people. It's saying, "I want what's best for you." Not for me, not what can I get out of the relationship and leave our relationship half full, but rather a life that's living constantly, daily, receiving God's love and overflowing in your life with the love of God for other people.

Love is the fulfillment of the law; love is the commitment to the betterment of other people; and love urgently understands that our salvation is nearer now than it's ever been before, verse 11, "And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

Love is urgently understanding that our salvation is nearer today than it has ever been before. The call to love is the call to wake up from your slumber, wake up from your sleep. The call to love is to realize the urgency of the world in which we are living that is desperately looking for truth in all the wrong places; that is more interested in dividing ourselves than it is in coming together on what is most important in life.

Now is the time, but how are we to understand this present season? How are we to understand the present day in which we are living? How are we to understand the racial injustices and these things in our world that are unfolding around our nation? How are we to understand the political divisiveness that separates the Right from the Left with the inability to come together in agreement for the good of the American people? How are we to understand these natural disasters coming upon us: these wild, raging fires out west in

California and these natural disasters on the coast of Hurricane Laura? How are we to understand the present time?

Well, one way is to understand that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. And if we believe that, if we have an urgency to understand that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed, we will throw off the sin of our past and cling to the hope of our future. Verse 12, "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and let us put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. No, rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to fulfill the desires of the sinful nature."

The hope of our future rests on this truth: loving others with the same love that Jesus loves us. That is the only hope for our future; the only hope of moving forward as a community; the only hope of moving forward as a nation; the only hope of moving forward as a church is to love others with the same love that has captured our lives, that continues to lead us to our knees in humility, that continues to say, "Lord, I am nothing without you. Lord, fill my cup to overflow. Fill me, Lord, that I might be a beacon of light, a beacon of truth, and to those who are in destitute situations, those around the world and in Third World countries who need the love of Jesus Christ. Lord, fill my cup with your love because that's the only hope for the future."

That's the only way to move forward, to bring the Kingdom of God to the earth, and to see God's Kingdom advanced. But you ask, "Why love? I've already tried that. I've put my heart out there already. My heart, as you can see, is already torn and broken into pieces. Why love? What is that going to do? What's that going to get me?"

We love because Jesus first loves us. We love because He, our Lord, our savior, left heaven, came to earth to die, to show you a perfect picture of sacrificial love. We love because He first loved us. That is the hope that we have for our future.

So what is life all about? Life is pretty simple: it's all about loving God, receiving His love, and loving other people. Nothing more, nothing less.

Amen