

LOVE COMMANDMENTS Part Two

In the Guinness Book of World Records there is listed the shortest sermon ever preached. It was given by John Albrecht, an Episcopal priest in Michigan. He stood in his pulpit to preach, paused, and said "Love!" He then sat down. Some of Albrecht's members said it was the best sermon he ever preached.

We all know that sequels are not always as good as the original movie. But who would argue with the powerful and exciting episodes of the Lord of the Rings? Today's sermon is a sequel

Today's scriptures are about love and whenever you are given a command then you know it must be serious. In last week's gospel lesson we heard Jesus say, "If you love me keep my commandments." Now we hear him say, "Abide in my love." "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." "You are my friends if you do what I tell you."

All human beings crave true love. We are all searching for someone who will be true to their word; follow through on what they say they will do, and demonstrate their love by doing what you ask. These are the measures of true love. Jesus had the same measurements. He called them commandments. And if we follow them, and have love one for another we will have joy.

Unfortunately "love" has also become one of the most meaningless words in our vocabulary. The American Heritage Dictionary defines love in terms of sex and sports: an "intense affection and warm feeling for another person; strong sexual desire for another person) a strong fondness or enthusiasm; or a zero score in tennis."

The sacrificial, incarnational nature of Christ-like love has been lost amid our claims that we "love" our favorite soft drink, baseball team, or partner-of-the-moment. Love has become such a nebulous, fuzzy, catch-all term that we resist thinking about what must be present for true love to exist and to flourish - for love to be able to "bear fruit."

The story (perhaps apocryphal) is told of a young man named Bill, a college student with wild hair, torn clothing and rather imperfect personal hygiene. He's a brilliant but off-beat guy who became a Christian while attending college. Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They say they want to

develop a ministry to the students but are not sure how to go about it.

One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with jeans, torn T-shirt, no shoes and wild hair. The service has already started, and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed, and he can't find one. By now people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer and closer and closer to the pulpit and, when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet.

By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, a deacon is slowly making his way toward Bill. Now the deacon is in his 80s, has silver-gray hair, wears expensive cologne and a three-piece suit. A godly man - very elegant, very dignified, very courtly. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?

It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy. The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. You can't even hear anyone breathing. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do. And now they see this elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him so he won't be alone.

What is the measure of God's love? Jesus gave it to us with these words: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." To "abide" here means to "dwell" or "to live or reside in a place." Our Lord asks us to take up residence in this mutual love so demonstrated by the Father and the Son. We are to make our home there as Christians. We are to sit down with others who hunger for true love.

It is not surprising that Barnabas when he arrived in Antioch found a home where the Lord is found. There was so much "devotion," a word that means deep love and commitment, that the grace of God was evident and he did one of these (kicked up his heels!) He got so excited he told them to keep feeding this Spirit and took off to find Saul in Tarsus.

Now if you have ever watched someone brought into a group with notoriety whose reputation preceded them then you know what a chance Barnabas took by bringing Saul to Antioch. Was there a

chance the Spirit might have been quenched? Was there a possibility that people would leave because of what Saul had once stood for - the incarceration and death of Christians? Instead, because of their devotion the Christians at Antioch received Saul and let him teach them!

Last week I spoke of a mother's love. And I mentioned one line from a woman whose favorite honor in life was to be called Mother Teresa. An expansion of her quote from last week speaks powerfully of the true love in which Jesus asks us to abide:

Mother Teresa: "People are often unreasonable, illogical and self-centered; forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives; be kind anyway.

"If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies; succeed anyway.

"If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you; be honest and frank anyway. What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight; build anyway.

"If you find eternity and happiness, they may be jealous; be happy anyway.

"The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow; do good anyway. Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; give the world the best you've got anyway. You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God; It was never between you and them anyway."

~Mother Teresa, *A Simple Path*

Love never says, "What did you do for me?" It never says, "Look what I gave." As Mother Teresa teaches us, in the final analysis, Love is between, you and God. The nature of God is simply put. It is love. May God, may his love remembered in our baptism be our earthly and eternal bond, now and forever. AMEN.