

Let Your Hearts Go

One day Abraham invited a beggar to his tent for a meal.

When grace was being said, the man began to curse God, declaring he could not bear to hear his name.

Seized with indignation, Abraham drove the blasphemer away.

When he was at his prayers that night, God said to him,

"This man has cursed and reviled me for fifty years, and yet I have given him food to eat every day. Could you not put up with him for a single meal?"

On St. Valentine's Day this week I want to tell you simply this - love each other.

Love each other - not with the love that depends on chemistry, mood, and feelings - nor even with the love that depends on the behavior of others, but love each other with the kind of love Christ refers to in today's reading from the Sermon on the Mount.

You know the kind of love I mean -- it is the love that goes beyond what seems right according to the letter of the law, and enters into the Spirit of what God wants for us, the love that enters into feeding others, into healing others, into showing grace to others, into giving peace to others, the love that values others, regardless of who they are or what they have or have not done.

Someone once caught WC Fields reading the Bible.

"What are you doing?" asked the person.

"Looking for loopholes," growled Fields.

With love - my friends - there is no loophole, no escape hatch, and no clauses that say the deal can be revoked if this or that condition is not met.

Love is total - it is unconditional - or it is not love at all.

There are no loopholes to be found in Jesus' words--

No compromises,

No deals,

No escape hatches.

What Jesus does is crystallize the issues involved in loving God and our neighbors so we can know - without doubt - just where we stand, and exactly what we need to aim for.

Think about where you stand for a minute - Think about how you love others and ask yourself - is my love up to the standards set by Christ?

- If you haven't killed someone - who have you called a fool? What emotion did you pour out upon him or her when you became angry with them?

- If you haven't committed adultery - and felt good about this - consider what you have wanted to do...

- Or consider who holds a grudge against you because of something you did - something for which you have not apologized?

- Or again - what promises and vows have you broken and then justified yourself in doing so?

- When was the last time you criticized immigrants for stealing all the jobs in this country, or expressed your dislike for the person who took the promotion that belonged to you?

Perhaps these are poor examples - but most of us, you know, love only our friends and our family - and we are not sure about our family at times....

We greet those who greet us,
We do good to those who do good to us,
We lend to those who will pay back,
We welcome those who welcome us.

As for everyone else - well - if asked, most of us have a reason for what we do, and an excuse for what we do not do.

What we aim for as Christians - is to break through the limitations of our excuses, we aim to destroy all reasons that we might offer to treat one person as less than another and to enter into relationships with each other that are based upon our equality before God.

The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches we can meet all the demands of love that are expressed in the law in one way - and only in one way - we can do so if we our hearts go there first.

Today - this Valentine's Day week - I urge you - let your hearts go -love God and love each other as deeply as you can.

When you do - you will find, no matter how many mistakes you may make on the way, that goodness and blessedness will blossom along your path, and all that God has planned will come to pass. Amen.