

It's so hard to know what's true these days. Singing the national anthem now has all sorts of drama because it might be taped beforehand. Phone calls you get sound true but really can be tricking you into giving up personal information. People dress up pretending to be police officers but really they want to do some serious harm to you. So much of what seems true is really false.

What about love? Growing up that's all little girls want to find is true love. I think older girls want to find the same thing. Boys don't like talking about love, but deep down they want to be loved too. So if we grow up wanting these things, how will we know when it's true love?

Leave it to the disciple that Jesus loved to tell us about love. The Apostle John's first letter that was the second lesson is really all about true love. We look at three little verses so that we can determine...

**What is true love?
Based in God
Actions that come from God**

True love has lost its foundation. To the world love is hearts, candy, hugs and kisses. It's that butterflies feeling in your stomach. Feelings become the basis for true love. One day I might love one person but because feelings change the next day I might love someone else. This is supposed to be true love, feelings that change so quick? There can be no guarantees if true love is based on feelings. No absolutes. I don't have to be committed to one person because love is a crazy thing.

There was a foundation different from what you'll find today. It was a foundation that didn't come from our hearts. It wasn't warm mushy feelings. True love came only from God. **"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."** That's true love. Christ Jesus laid down his life. For us. It's more than a gooey love note. It's more than just a Hallmark card full of nice sounding poetry. God's the basis for love. He's the one who showed true love, first. He alone can show us what true love is.

The world is looking for something completely different. God's definition can be ignored because God's not around, he's not living my life, and he doesn't seem to care. So we redefine love. Love starts with the object I may or may not love. What do they look like? Do they have the right hair color or eye color? Do they smile and light up the room? Do they meet certain criteria I find attractive. Then I could love them, but if the outside changes I might stop loving them. Okay, you're not the superficial type. You say it's what's inside that counts. So look for Mr. Kind and Smart. Look for Miss Fun and Laughs a lot. These beautiful inside traits are things I can love about the other person. But if they change attitude, or if they weren't as kind as I once thought then I can fall out of love just as fast as I fell in love.

Human beings always think true love has something to do with the object loved. How cute they are, how squeezable, or how much I fall head over heels in love. But true love has nothing to do with the object of love. Nothing. True love doesn't exist because of the quality of the thing being loved. If it did God would never love us, because we're not cute or squeezable. We're not love material. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** We're sinners. God expected us to live up to his standards laid out in the Bible. Do certain things and don't do other things. We failed. We redefined what God wrote about love, relationships, and ourselves. We sinned against him and turned into objects of his wrath. We tried to pretty ourselves up by trying to do good works. But no matter how much we tried we couldn't make God love us by what we do. Instead of growing towards God we grew further apart from him.

Remember the foundation for true love isn't outside or inside you and me. True love comes from God. **"Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."** True love is Jesus and what he did. He's the one who didn't look special on the outside and had nothing that would make him especially loveable. Yet when he laid down his life into death on the cross, we got a glimpse of our real life, our new life. When he rose again and now lives we knew our new life was safe in Jesus. Inside Jesus was true God and true man. His death counted for all your sins and mine. Jesus' perfect life and death were exactly what God required to pay for all your sins. Inside Jesus was everything that we needed. He was the perfect Savior.

Out of that grace he continues to call us to faith. He calls us away from our sins and calls us to the new life we have in Christ. He strengthens our faith. He assures us of everlasting life. Hear the Word of God. See how God loves you without any hope of gaining anything in return. He loves you because of Christ. See how God loved you enough to rescue you from a deadly situation. **"And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."** Our life can now reflect his life and his love.

On the front of your service folder this morning it quotes Paul's words to the Corinthians in the famous chapter on love, chapter thirteen. **"If I have not love, I am nothing."** Paul knew where true love was based. It was based in God found in Christ. But Paul was talking about the actions that he was doing. If those actions weren't based in love, which was based in God, then those actions were essentially nothing. As your love takes action understand those actions of love come from God.

As Jesus recounted the deeds of love of the sheep on his right in the gospel, he spoke of their actions. **“Hungry...gave me something to eat, thirsty...gave me something to drink, stranger...you invited me in, needed clothes...you clothed me, sick...you looked after me, in prison...you came to visit me.”** These believers didn’t even realize they were doing anything special. They simply knew that God loved them in Christ and loving actions flowed from that. They had the ability and so they helped where they could. That helping demonstrated the love of God in them. Taking no action was impossible for them. It wouldn’t have been loving.

Christian love with all talk and no action isn’t Christian love. Words are great, actions complete the promise made. Are there people around you who seem down and depressed? Are they lacking love? Don’t pass them by saying you hope they find a friend. Do you know someone hurting and feeling so unloved they might be thinking about doing themselves harm? Praying for them is good, befriending them and listening to them is loving. Maybe you know someone in your life into sex without consequences, sex before marriage. They’re substituting sex for love. Wishing they’d stop but never talking to them about it won’t help the one who needs help. Maybe you know seniors in assisted living homes or prisoners in jail that need love. Passing them by with only a word of encouragement but not stopping doesn’t help them.

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” Love that is seen in action is going to come from God. It originates in the love God has for you in Christ. That kind of love is a love of action. Jesus didn’t just say he loved us; he came to this world to show he loved us. He came with perfect life and forgiveness for all our sins. He came with a heart that sees the hurt and the loneliness and a passion to help with the gospel. The love of Jesus is action. He demonstrated to the world in a specific way, by hanging on the cross and dying. He showed it when he rose again.

That love becomes a personal love beating in our hearts. Its active, looking across the pews to see people among the family of believers that need love and help. It sees those hurting from past relationships now begging for true love from a friend. It sees those hurting financially needing a boost right now. You can’t sit on the sidelines. Each of you must love the ones around you. Love one another. Plug into the basis for true love often by being regular in worship. Hear the Word of God where true love is described. Participate in the sacraments to feed your faith so it can put love into action. You be the first to make a move, be the first to love, the first to serve, the first to say I love you and show it in action motivated by God.

So many things aren’t true these days. But something always will be true that you can come back to. God’s love for you in Christ will always be true. True love is based in God because it comes from him. True love is always a love of action that models itself only after the love he had first for you. The world may have lost sight of true love, but in Christ you know what true love is.