

John 3:16

"You Know the Answer"

Do y'all know the story of "Little Ann"? (Pause) Little Ann was a young African-American girl growing up in rural Tennessee. She sang in the church choir, and came from a troubling and tempestuous family. Her father was abusive. Her mother ran out and left. They moved around a lot. By the time she was 16 this young girl was living in St. Louis. She and her sister used to sneak into night clubs. One night as a joke, the drummer of one of the bands gave "Little Ann" a chance to sing one of their songs during the intermission. Some referred to "Little Ann's" voice as high pitched and screechy. Later a producer for the band would describe "Little Ann's" voice as, "screaming dirt." The leader of the band liked the way Little Ann's voice was raw and different. He gave Little Ann a chance to sing with the band as a regular guest performer. The leader of the band taught "Little Ann" some of the finer points of music and singing on stage. The two soon became romantically involved and married. However, the leader of the band was no prince. He was physically abusive and addicted to cocaine. While the band had top 10 Pop success in the early 1970's it wasn't meant to last. "Little Ann" left the band leader in 1977 and struck out on her own as a solo act. Success did not come quickly. After three unsuccessful albums, "Little Ann" came upon a song nobody else wanted to sing. She dug into the pain and hurt of her childhood and her failed marriage to belt out these words,

"What's Love Got to do, got to do with it?!
What's Love,
but a sweet old fashioned notion?
What's Love Got to do, got to do with it?!
Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?"

Written by Terry Britten & Graham Lyle, Performed by Tina Turner,
"What's Love Got To Do With It," *What's Love Got To Do With It*
(Album), Capitol Records, ©1984.

Sisters and brothers (pause) who made that song a hit? (Tina Turner) That's right. Tina Turner made this song a hit in 1984. In our Scripture this morning Jesus Christ tells the Pharisee Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Brothers and

sisters what is the answer to Tina Turner's question, "What's love got to do with it?" (pause) (Everything) The answer to the question of what's love got to do with it is **EVERYTHING!** I knew y'all would know the answer.

Love has everything to do with why God gave Adam and Eve hope in the midst of the curse in Genesis 3. Love has everything to do with why God made a covenant with Abraham and kept it. Love has everything to do with Why God sent God's only son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Love is the greatest commandment. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). The second greatest commandment is like it. "[y]ou shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

Sisters and brothers love is a part of everything and anything that has to do with being a Christian. Being a Christian is not about being a moral person, or following rules. Any atheist or heathen can be a moral person. It is not enough to not be as bad as the really bad people on the news. For our Scouts joining us for worship today, I'm sorry. No amount of good deeds done daily can earn our way into heaven. Yes, doing a good deed and trying to help as many people as we can is good for our community; however, God expects more and God offers more in return.

Being a Christian is about loving God enough to put God first above our selfish wants and desires. Being a Christian means loving God enough to recognize when we need to be a team player; to put God first and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Let's face it sisters and brothers. Some people love themselves more than others. (pause) Some of us love ourselves more than others. (pause) God challenges us to love others as we love ourselves.

Some of us don't feel as though we are worthy of God's love. Some of us don't like ourselves at all. For Jesus Christ, that's just not good enough. Just because a person does not like themselves it does not give them a pass on loving their neighbors. Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

Here's the deal. Adam and Eve were God's creations and carried a natural love for God the Father. However, when their self-love and self-interests lead them to sin and try to take knowledge for themselves they stepped away from the light of God the Father. We all carry that original sin. We all carry that self-love which gets in the way of our ability to love anyone else. If we are to truly be God's we must be reborn in God's love and light. The only way to be reborn in God's light is for our rebellious, sinful nature to die so the love of God can be reborn. God is already reaching out for us. God has already made the first move. That is the point of this verse we all know so well. God loved us first. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

So where does the rubber meet the road? Where does Christ call us to love better today? (pause) Yesterday, just yesterday fifteen members of this congregation came together at the Mt. Shepherd retreat center to begin asking this very question. Where is God's love moving us to serve one another and to serve others in our community today? Where is love calling us to be more devoted to our calling to be leaders in the church?

Here are a few of the things the group came up with yesterday. In terms of the life cycle of our local church we are somewhere between unrealized decline and realized decline. Some of us have realized Central needs a little help, and some of us are still asleep in our pews. Some of us feel strongly that our church needs to do a better job of serving the members and visitors to our congregation. Some of us feel passionately we need to be serving the needs of those out in the community, and in the world. As we look around our sanctuary there are several who see a need to fill our pews.

We wrestled with all of these issues yesterday as we tried very hard to begin objectively assessing the needs of our church. Here's what we discovered. If we love God. If we truly love God then everyone one of us – not just the 15 from yesterday, but everyone in this room and on our membership roll who calls themselves Christians needs to be actively looking for ways to grow closer to God. We call those the means of grace. We also discovered that everyone who is a baptized believer of Jesus Christ in this church is called to be a leader of the church – Not a manager who tells folks what to do, but a leader who mentors and walks beside their brothers and sisters in Christ. By definition that is righteousness. Being in right relationship with God and loving our neighbor as ourselves is righteousness. Christ did not come to condemn, but to save. How did Jesus seek to save the lost? (pause) In life Jesus walked with people. Jesus walked beside people. In Jesus' death and resurrection Jesus saved us all. The season of Lent is about to start this Wednesday what will we do this season to follow Christ's example? Will we give up sugar, or caffeine, or will we try to pick one way we might walk beside someone outside these walls so they will come to know Jesus for themselves? Will we walk beside those who are inside these walls that we might grow closer to God together? If we believe God's love has everything to do with being a Christian then what are we doing to allow God's love to shine inside and outside of these walls?

By God's Good Grace, Amen