

John 13:34
Love One Another
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The author Philip Yancey puts it this way: Some things are loved because they are beautiful. Other things are beautiful because they are loved. If you want to get a perfect image for what this means, imagine a child's blanket—or as we call them in our house “tootie.” These small squares of woven or embroidered fabric contain within them every ounce of love, affection, and value a child has to give.

A friend of ours has a daughter a little bit older than Annie, and if you didn't know any better, you would think that binky was nothing more than a dirty dishrag. It has been held, chewed, washed, dried, dragged, bagged, pulled, and prodded. Now all that is left is a tattered and faded collection of fibers. But don't you dare try to replace it.

John Ortberg tells the story of his younger sister who had a doll named Pandy. “Pandy had lost a good deal of her hair, one of her arms was missing, and, generally speaking, she'd had the stuffing knocked out of her. She was my sister Barbie's favorite doll.

“When Pandy was young and a looker, Barbie loved her. She loved her with a love that was too strong for Pandy's own good. When Barbie went to bed at night, Pandy lay next to her. When Barbie had lunch, Pandy ate beside her at the table. When Barbie could get away with it, Pandy took a bath with her.

“By the time I knew Pandy, she was not a particularly attractive doll. In fact, to tell the truth she was a mess. She was no longer a very valuable doll; I'm not sure we could have given her away. But for reasons that no one could ever quite figure out, in the way that kids sometimes do, my sister Barbie loved that little rag doll still.

“Once we took a vacation from our home in Rockford, Illinois, to Canada. We had returned almost all the way home when we realized at the Illinois border that Pandy had not come back with us. She had remained behind at the hotel in Canada. No other option was thinkable. My father turned the car around and we drove from Illinois all the way back to Canada. We were a devoted family.”

Some things are loved because they are beautiful, other things are beautiful because they're loved. To be loved is to be treated with the full weight of your God-given value, known as we are meant to be known, valued by the full measure of your beauty in God's eyes. And as the Bible will attest, that is God's dream for every living creature. It is God's overflowing heart that desires that be known to all.

This morning, we are beginning a series of summer time messages that will lead us through much of these summer months. Summer is a beautiful time for backyard barbeques, ballgames, and just a chance to be out among one another. What better time look at just that: how do we...one another? And how can we...one another better?

Each week, we'll look at a different *one another* statement from the New Testament, as we use these precious warm months to draw nearer to Christ as we draw nearer to one another.

So if you would, please read along with me one short verse from the Gospel of John chapter 13 verse 34.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

I'm going to give you three statements all of which are true: I love Basil's Gyro Meat Pizza in Northfield, Minnesota; I love my wife; I love God. I am saying the same thing, but their meaning is profoundly different. We say the word in our English language a lot, but I wonder if we understand its full implication. I don't know if you realize it, but I love Gyro Pizza!

The original language of the New Testament, Greek, does a much better job of helping us understand the implications of this word love. In some places, you will see the word *eros* used; this is the word we use to get the word erotic. In the Greek language, the word *eros* is not just limited to human sexuality, but rather it is any love that is based on a desire for something of value, it's based on an appetite. It is love that is based on beauty, and in this regard, it is an insatiable kind of love.

But the other word used is the word *agape*. This is the word Jesus uses here in John 13. This kind of love creates beauty in another. Some things are beautiful because they are loved. *Eros* celebrates value, *agape* creates value.

We've just come through the most important season in the life of the Church, the time when we remember God's ultimate expression of love for us, Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. But in John's gospel, during what's called the Thursday night discourse, Jesus gives his most concise and valuable teaching about how they will carry out their God-given mission. And it focuses on this gift of *agape* love.

You see, it's one thing to say that you love something like pizza or the Green Bay Packers; it's something very different

Agape love is not an idea, it's an action. You cannot *agape* love something and go unchanged because of it; you cannot *agape* love something and not have it disrupt and overturn your world. My love for Amy, as my wife, means that I will stop at nothing, no limit too great, to let her know how much I adore her. People don't write sonnets and journey to the ends of the earth for pizza.

Agape love changes you, because it assigns beauty where there was none. *Agape* love is also concrete. You cannot abstractly *agape* love someone.

Let me give you an example. When I was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary, Amy and I had a dear friend named Dave. And Dave was one of the most brilliant and eccentric individuals I've ever had the pleasure of knowing. A true friend. But in his eccentricity, he was often misunderstood. Personally, I always thought I was about three steps behind Dave in any conversation.

Now one of the wonderful things about the student body at Princeton Theological is a heart for the outcast members of society, the poor, the persecuted, the marginalized. And what I learned is that it's not only one of the wonderful things, but it is also one of the most heartbreaking things, as well.

After chapel one day when Amy and I had just begun dating, we were talking with Dave, and after he left for his next class, one of our other classmates, an outspoken advocate for the outcast and marginalized, leaned in and said: "I don't know how you can stand to be around him."

We cannot love one another in the abstract. Just feeling a certain way about someone around the globe whom you will never have physical contact may be virtuous, may be a good human thing to do, but it is not love. Love assigns value because it recognizes God's unique fingerprint upon it and acts differently because of it.

St. Augustine once said that one of the roots of all sin is disordered love. Our love for one thing becomes higher than another thing. Our love for our needs and desires is placed above the needs and desires of another. And while we say that we love something, our actions say something very different.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Jesus, in John 13, reveals this not by offering a definition or an idea, but Jesus reveals the truth of what love is in an act. During the meal on Holy Thursday, Jesus stood up from the table, wrapped a towel around his waist, and then began to do the lowliest of all jobs: he began to wash his disciples' feet.

Tim Keller puts it really profoundly and succinctly when he says: if you want to know what love is, it's two words, "wash feet."