

Agape Love

Our gospel today starts off with Jesus on a journey. This isn't just any journey but one that represents the road to Jerusalem and the cross. The place where Jesus paid the ultimate price and died for our sins so that we could have eternal life. The rich man ran up to Jesus and knelt before him, asking how he can inherit eternal life. Jesus starts by listing off six of the ten commandments:

- You shall not murder
- You shall not commit adultery
- You shall not steal
- You shall not bear false witness
- You shall not defraud
- Honor your father and mother.

All of these commandments act as a guide of how we are to treat one another. When the rich man responds that he has kept all the commands since his youth Jesus responds with an even bigger request:

“You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

The passage goes on to say:

“When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”

After the rich man walks away, Jesus looked to his disciples and said:

“Children, how hard it is^(b) to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

Even the disciples were shocked by Jesus request asking each other:

“Then who can be saved?”

“For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

At this point, it can be easy to see Jesus as someone who is making it nearly impossible for this man to have eternal life in heaven. After all, the rich man is not the only one who is shocked by Jesus' declaration. so also are all those who were close enough to hear Jesus. Given that wealth was considered a sign of blessing in the first century and I would argue the same for even now in the present day, Jesus words to this man and his later statement about the difficulty the rich will have in entering the kingdom are alarming.

BUT if you re-read verse 21 it says “Jesus looking at him, *LOVED* him.”

HE LOVED HIM

Now, in the English language the meaning of the word love can be unclear. Because you can love your mom, and you can love pizza. And if the word “love” means the same thing in both of those cases, your mom’s going to feel real bad.

So what exactly does the word “love” mean in this situation?

As Jesus’ followers spread his teachings around the world, they translated them into Greek using the word:

Agape

Here’s where it get’s fascinating-The earliest followers of Jesus who translated Jesus’ teaching’s in Greek, didn’t learn the meaning of agape by looking it up in ancient dictionaries. Rather, they looked to the teachings of Jesus and the story of his life to redefine their very concept of “love.”

- Agape love is *action* instead of a feeling.
- It’s a choice that you make to seek the well-being of people other than yourself.
- it’s seeking people’s well being without expecting anything in return. Especially from people who can’t repay you even if they wanted to.

This kind of generous love reflects the very heartbeat of God.

So in the story of the rich young man, Jesus’ love for him is sincere. He does not treat the rich man’s declaration of keeping the commandments as insincere or mock him as self-righteous,

but rather Jesus *loves* him. We must take seriously Jesus' absolute regard and unconditional love for this man. That means that even though the rich man chose his to not sell everything he owned to give away to the poor, Jesus still loved him unconditionally.

Since it's youth led worship I want to speak to how we can come alongside them.

These young people are growing up in a generation that many refer to a "godless" generation. It's pretty true, more young people are leaving the church than ever. We are surrounded by a generation who would rather do anything else than sit in a pew. They see the religious system as being too stuck, full of pride and judgment. They feel like religion is a list of should and should not's, a place where they are told what to do instead of having an interactive experience where their voice is heard and valued. Instead of finding authenticity and love in church, they look to other places because they don't get to experience authentic relationships here in the church. Why would anyone want to stay if they are only viewed as a "project" on which we can project a list of rules? The more we try to "protect" them in this way, the more we reject what God is trying to do through them. Instead of forcing people onto some "religious journey" let's just invite them along for the ride. Let's look to share before we share before we teach. Let's make life in Jesus a little more interactive. Care for them. Because you can never underestimate the power of someone who truly cares and dares to be the one person who will listen when no one else will. Then maybe, the church will be seen as a living, breathing, active and authentic place that people look to and say "I want what they've got."

That is his project of AUTHENTIC LOVE.

This is the kind of AGAPE love that Jesus was talking about. That authentic love that people can't help but be attracted to. Meeting people right where they are at in their lives.

- Include young people in on discussions and decisions; they give perspectives that are often overlooked.
- Invest in their lives no matter where they are at, be someone who will listen.
- Let them be angry with God without shaming them for their feelings.
- Listen to what they have to say about what they value in a worship service. Their experience on Sunday mornings is just as important as anyone else's.
- Help them explore other perspectives and religions when they ask.
- Never underestimate what they can bring to the table.
- Educate them on systematic oppression in the world, they are the ones who are going to be tasked to dismantle those systems.
- This generation is FULL of change-makers who can make a real difference when given the opportunity.

Please remember that you can never remind them too often that they are a loved, cherished child of God who was created for reason to help change this world and can do nothing to separate themselves from the love of Christ.

Above all else, show them Agape love through your life and your actions.