

February 11, 2024
The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
Pastor Matt Duerr

“A Confessional Church-If”

Grace, Mercy and Peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. We come to the end of our sermon series on “A Confessional Church.” And you might be looking at today's title of *“If”* and wondering where the world we're going to go. Let's first take a look at where we've been. We've been looking at the creeds. We confess our faith each week, and we confess that we believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. And we looked at how big our God is. There's nothing impossible for Him.

Then we looked at His only begotten Son, the Logos, the One, the only answer for salvation, for life. And He promised us a helper, the Holy Spirit who would come with power and make us witnesses, make us God's people. And of course, when we look at Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three distinctly different entities, and yet one God where Jesus is saying, ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’ We also take a look at that and go, wow, our God is big. He's even beyond our comprehension. There's none of us that are triune like that.

And you might think that that's the end, but it's not because our confession doesn't end there. We just said it. We also believe in the holy Christian Church. And this is where that creed gets personal. Very personal. The Holy Christian Church. Holy, means set Apart, set apart for what? Christian, Christian literally means Christ like. And that leads to the title of our sermon, *“If.”*

Because when it comes to being Christ-like, there are five Ifs that Jesus Himself gives us. In John 8:31 through 32, he says, “If you abide in my word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” *If* you abide in my word, you are being Christ-like. Abide means to means to do exactly what His word says. Well, abiding in His word, what did He say? Hang on, here we go!

John 13:35 “By this all people will know that you are my disciples *if* you love one another.” Now, understand love, in the English language, we've got one word, love. In the Greek there's seven, four of which are commonly used in the Bible. The first is Eros. It's named after the goddess of fertility Eros. It's also considered the first and most basic kind of love. It's the love of sexual passion and desire. It's very looks oriented. I'm sure everyone of us basically can say ‘I remember a time when I saw someone and went wow! Beautiful, Handsome...’ I'll let you fill in the rest. But it's considered that very basic kind of love because it is very physical or looks based. It's, shall we say, extremely natural. And that's where we got the word erotic from because boy, you know that kind of love can lead you down all sorts of horrible pathways. The second kind of love is storge. It's familial love, the love of family, the love a parent has for his or her child. And the love back the love of a child for his or her parent. It's a very strong bond of love and it often looks the other way when the object of love is maybe misbehaving a little bit. Just ask any teacher or coach about that. ‘Oh, little Johnny would never do... or little Mary would never say’... It's from storge love that we get the saying “love is blind.” Because sometimes parents love their children so much, they really can't see who their children are, or they choose not to see because it hurts so much.

That leads us to the third kind of love, Philia love. It's the most general type of love in the Bible. It's brotherly love. It's where we get the name for our city, Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. But it's talking about that brotherly love, that that kind of bond of love you have between two very close friends. A perfect biblical example would be David and his good friend Jonathan, the son of the King, the Prince, the heir apparent. And yet David had been anointed to become king, and as a result Saul hated him and wanted to kill him. But Jonathan's love for David was stronger than his storge love for his dad. He chose David. This is not an eros love like some people want to make it. No, this is Philia love, a bond between two brothers, between two good, good friends. Jonathan is willing to let David know, ‘You have got to leave, otherwise you're going to be in trouble.’ Where Jonathan did everything he could to protect

David. He chose David over his father Saul. Brotherly love, there's a whole new level there.

But then there's the next level and it's like seven levels above that. Agape love, and that's the love that we see when we look at Jesus. It's sacrificial love. Love one another like I love. It's that love of God the Father and God the Son that we see in John 3:16. "For God so loved (agape love) the world that He sent His only begotten Son." God was willing to sacrifice His Son for the sake of His creation, Yes, overriding His storge love for His Son. And Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself for His creation. And understand the sacrifice is much more than the cross. The sacrifice began when He allowed Himself to be confined to the womb of a human woman, when He was laid in a Manger, when He had to be fed by His mother. When He walked this earth. And he couldn't just say you let there be food. No, He had to work and cook. Then He walked this earth and was harassed by His own creation and, yes, sacrificed on the cross because He loves us. He willingly died to self in so many ways. Which takes us back to John 13:35. By this all people will know that you are my disciples *if* you have love for one another, and that love is agape love.

So, in the Christian Church the Christ-like church, we sacrifice ourselves. We sacrifice our individual desires, our individual wants. We sacrifice our self pride we sacrifice daily life for the person who's sitting right next to you. It is the most active of the loves because it is always looking out for others.

Using the common phrase from our own English language. It's keeping your eye on the ball. That's a sports euphemism. On defense, you need to know where the ball is so you can prevent it from being used to score a goal. But then on the other side, it's important on offense to keep your eye on the ball so that you know where the ball is at, and you can get open, and that you know where the ball is at, and you can score. But it is also a military term from the Navy. As a fighter jet is coming in to land on an aircraft carrier, he has the ball and he's keeping his eye on the ball. And it's the way that they land the jet. If you take your eye off the ball, you're too high, you overshoot the runway. Too low, you crash

into the back of the aircraft carrier, right or left splash, you're taking a bath. Jesus kept His eye on the ball, on His mission on our salvation 100% of the time.

And that leads us to the third *if*. If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself, (Agape love) and take up his cross daily and follow Me." I'm sure you've heard that saying Jesus Christ first, other second, yourself last. And when it comes to this kind of action, this *if*, denying self and taking up the cross daily, not just Sundays, daily. I have to be honest; I think we've seen a lot of that in the last 18 months as we've come closer and closer and closer together.

And then we come to Luke, Chapter 14 versus 26 and 27, which is a two-part verse. Part one, *if* anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters; so this is overcoming both storge and philia love, they cannot be my disciples. Now understand hate. The Greek that's used there means aversion from or disregard for. What it's really saying is. If your family is against Christ, then you need to choose Christ over family. Have a greater regard for Christ than for even family. Remember the storge love and the power of storge love, love can be blind. It's the ability to say no, I have no choice. I must choose Christ over you. When family is against Christ. It is not a call to hate your father and mother or your brother or sister or your children. If they love Christ, no, then we agape love them... I was almost going to say to death, but that wouldn't be inappropriate. We love them like Jesus did, who died for them so that they might live forever, and we might live forever in heaven with Him.

But as I said, it's the two-parter. And this is maybe where it gets the hardest of all. "If," you can be his disciple if, you love yourself less than Him. If you love your life more than Christ, He says, you cannot be my disciple. September 22nd, 1776, it's reported that a Great American patriot, Nathan Hale, was being led to the gallows to be hanged to death for espionage against the British Empire. It is said that he said. I quote, "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country." He loved his country, didn't he? If you ever get the chance to read the book The Voice of the Martyrs, you will read that statement, or one very much like it,

over and over and over. Individuals who said. "I regret that I have but one life for the sake of my Lord Jesus Christ."

This is the holy Christian Church, set apart to be a Christ like body of believers. And This is why Saint Paul in First Corinthians 12 then picks that up and he focuses on each part as being significant. There are not greater parts. They're not lesser parts. They are all needed to function properly. And so, getting back to the agape love, it's loving that person is sitting right next to you. The one behind you, or the one in front of you, or the one that drives you up the wall. Because without all the parts of the body of Christ. The body of Christ suffers.

In the body of Christ, the Christian Church. It's the one place where the phrase, "I want," should rarely exist. Because it is replaced with he, she, they... They need is the common view. It's looking out for each other, caring more for each other. Because that is exactly what Christ's view is of us. And the natural segue for that is Lent. Welcome to Lent which begins this Wednesday. Lent is 40 days of focusing on the agape love of our Savior for us. And if we are a confessional Church, we will have that same love for Him, and for each other.

In our Saviors' Name, Amen.