SERMON- MESSAGE – FEBRUARY, 20, 2022

Title: God's *Love Continues Forever!* **Rev. Ted Althouse, Pastor**

Texts: John 13 **Chapel of Cypress Cove**

John Chapter 13: It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.[2] The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. [3] Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; [4] so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. [5] After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. [6] He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" [7] Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." [8] "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." [9] "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" [10] Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." [11] For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean. [12] When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. [13] "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. [14] Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. [15] I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. [16] Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. [17] Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

<u>Jesus Predicts His Betrayal</u>

[18] "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.' [19] "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. [20] Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." [21] After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me." [22] His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. [23] One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. [24] Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." [25] Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" [26] Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. [27] As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So, Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." [28] But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. [29] Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give

something to the poor. [30] As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

[31] When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. [32] If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. [33] "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.[34] "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [35] By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." [36] Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." [37] Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." [38] Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

Last Monday, most of the world celebrated Valentine's Day which originated as a Christian feast day honoring one of the Christian martyrs named Saint Valentine (BC 226-269). Later through folk traditions, Valentine's Day has become a significant cultural, religious, and commercial celebration of romance and love in many regions of the world.

The Holy Scriptures do not speak directly about Valentine's Day but do tell us that we are to embrace the Valentine's Day theme to love one another. This sounds good, but can we really do it? Martin Luther King Jr once was quoted as saying, *"I love mankind; it's the people I*

can't stand." He was correct because many people are just irritating and hard to really love. Christopher J.H. Wright (Author of The Mission of God) said, *“To live above with those we love, oh, how that will be glory. To live below with those we know, now that's another story.”* Even people at church can sometimes be difficult to love. We may sing a chorus in church from an old hymn*: "I'm so glad you're a part of the family of God,"* and then we might look at the person beside us and think, *"I'm surprised your part of the family of God."* Also, sometimes it's hard enough to love our self or are own family. We all know that many of today’s family units have been ripping at the seams and deteriorating. There are many reasons for this and one is that many families do not know what true L-O-V-E really is. A simple definition of family love refers to bonds characterized by deep affection, respect, loyalty, and healthy attachment. Wow! Just pause for a moment and make a quick assessment of your own family and

hopefully you will find one or all of those family love adjectives: deep affection or respect or loyalty or healthy attachment.

Many years ago, my wife and I had a close personal friendship with a wealthy blended Jewish family living in Miami Beach. Between them they had 12 children and the parents insisted that every child be present at the evening dinner table. The family could afford house help including a cook who would assist the mother in preparing fantastic meals every evening. With 12 children they had a very large home (actually a 15-room mansion) with a huge dining room and table where everyone, and I mean every child, the two parents and any guest would comfortably sit to dine. At the beginning of the meal, prayers were said and 4 of the older children were pleased to go to the serving table and bring everyone their desired chosen meals. But what made this large family special was not their wealth but during each meal, everyone was required to share something good

and sometimes not so good, that took place in their life that day. These issues were freely discussed among the family and if any decision had to be made…it was done at that time. I'm sharing this story because this family emphasized real love which included affection, respect, and loyalty which bonded them all in a healthy family attachment. The codicil to this story is that only after 10 years of this wonderful blended American family, the father died suddenly at the age of 55. However, because of their financial stability, the mother kept the family together and everyone moved forward to live successful lives. Love was one of the most important elements in that family that I'm so happy to also have been a part of.

So, how do we make love a dominating characteristic of our lives? One very important way is to make love a priority. I agree that loving some people is difficult. Yet this is what the Bible commands us to do. The apostle John says: *"For this is the message you have heard from*

the beginning: we should love one another" (1 John 3:11). We must spend time on what we deem important. For many of us these choices are valid: time with family and friends, work, spiritual involvement, serving the poor, fighting for rights, protesting wrongs. But as the Scripture reminds us in I Corinthians 13:3: *"And if I donate all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing"* (Repeat).

Even though we have the freedom to set our own priorities, Jesus made a point of defining certain priorities for us: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'"* (Matthew 22:37-39). Love is not a gray area in the Scriptures. Jesus gave love priority over all other Christian virtues. Every thought, response, and act of

goodwill must first pass through the fine filter of love, or it means nothing at all.

In the book "*Strength to Love"*, Martin Luther King, Jr., encouraged us all to realize that *"our responsibility as Christians is to discover the meaning of this love command and seek passionately to live it out in our daily lives."* You might ask but why? What makes love so important? When Jesus was speaking to the law makers, he said: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* (Matthew 22: 37-39) Then he turned to his disciples and said this regarding the first and second greatest commands, he explained that *"All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands*" (Matthew. 22:40).To the people of Israel then, as well as for many

believers today, it would seem more logical for obedience to be the peg from which this Law hangs, since the point of writing a law is to adhere to it. And it is written where Jesus said: *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). But Jesus also said, *"I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another"* (John 13:34).

These LOVE commandments may sound irrelevant to our generation because we see violence increasing with guns in the wrong hands and attempts to uphold and fulfill the law of love is becoming more difficult. Yet Jesus' simple command of love sometimes requires greater strength than any of us naturally possess. Listen carefully: If one loves God as well as his neighbor (neighbor meaning all people), he/she will not commit acts of aggression with other individuals. Try to love your enemy as best as you can and you will not defame that

person. When we speak of this love of others, it doesn't mean we should love their negative and/or destructive actions. True love inspired by God fulfills and justifies the righteous/moral law, because if we truly love every person because he is a child of God…a human person, we will not desire to hurt or violate him or her, thus never break God's law. God established love as the motivation for obedience first unto him and then to self and others.

It is also important to understand that God wants us to first love HIM, then ourself and others. As I just said, we do not have to love the actions of all individuals. Many of these actions are not of God's approval and lead that person into the clutches of evil…which is the direct opposite of God's love. Also, we must not confuse God's love with its modern love counterfeits – lust and un-Christ-like gratification. While love is a wonderful, warm feeling, it is not only a feeling that encompasses actions. In fact, according to the Bible, God's love is

primarily an active interest in the well-being of self and other people. God's love acts for the benefit of others also.

God loves us not only because we have something to offer him, but rather because He has something to offer us. *"For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). God loves us so much that He demonstrated His mercy, compassion, forgiveness to each of us in the person of His only begotten/crated Son Jesus Christ.

Sincere Christian love is one of the dearest investments you will ever make. Love often takes a chance of character. Love often makes a profound statement and leaves a legacy. It often does the unexpected, surprises, and stirs our emotions. Love sometimes performs acts that steal the heart and leaves good and bad impressions on your human soul. Christian love often unavoidably

carries costs. But listen carefully to this next statement: Even when the cost of loving is high, we can nevertheless count on Almighty God to bring fulfillment of His love to His followers in any and all situations. True love is loving Jesus Christ first before anyone or anything.

In the end, the goal of the Christian life is love…to love God, to love self and to love others. The measure of our human maturity is our love and if we fail in our love, we have missed what it means to be a real and sincere Christian. Let us always remember that our Lord Jesus Christ, who even loved and forgave those who crucified Him, stands ready to forgive you of your lack of sincere love. He wants to show His mercy toward you today, to cleanse your loveless heart and fill it with His loving Holy Spirit. Receive His mercy and place your trust in Christ and let Him teach you how to love as He continues to love you forever.