

Truth and Action

Rev. John Allen

In 1995 a man named Gary Chapman wrote a book called “The Five Love Languages.”

This book offers a simple insight which I have seen be very powerful in couples I have worked with through the years. And that is that each of us have different ways of expressing love for another person, and each of us have different ways that we best experience love from another person.

Chapman calls these our “love languages.” The way we express love. The way we receive love.

He has identified five major love languages derived from his marriage counseling practice.

First is words of affirmation. This is love which is shared by saying kind and caring things, offering supportive words and encouragement.

Quality Time is all about showing love by offering someone the gift of undivided attention.

Then there is acts of service. People with this love language express their love by doing things for someone they love. Cooking their favorite meal for them, being self giving, offering to go the extra mile to be helpful and supportive.

Physical Touch is next, the sharing of love by sharing physical affection.

And giving and receiving gifts shows love by the thought and care put into a gift, even something as simple as flowers for no reason at all.

And of course we are not any of us all-or-nothing. We can give and receive love in many ways. But for most of us, one of these forms takes center stage.

I have found these love languages helpful in working with couples because sometimes stress and strain in any relationship can be caused when we try to

show love to someone in a way that they are not noticing, or when we cannot perceive the ways they are trying to show their love for us.

And this is not just about marriage or romantic relationships. This happens in relationships between friends and even between parents and children.

Say your love language is acts of service, you could try to show your love for your partner by doing the dishes every night for a month, but it wouldn't do any good if all your partner wanted was for you to sit with them and give them your undivided attention.

Knowing one another love languages though, you might remember that perhaps it would be better to let the dishes go for a bit to spend some quality time together before bed. And your partner may learn to see the sight of you elbow deep in suds as the romantic gesture it is.

And there is an even simpler insight at the very core of the love languages.

Love is not something you say.

Love is something you do.

We can wax philosophical about love, try to describe its beauty, strive to name its features, but in the end, we know love by what we do and what we see others do.

This morning's scripture reading says:

“We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before God.”

Love is not something you say.

Love is something that you do.

This passage from scripture lifts up the example of Jesus, who laid down his life for us. Who never met a person he was not moved with love for. Who touched the untouchable and ate with the people cast out of polite society.

Jesus life, and Jesus death shows us what God's love looks like. It takes the abstract idea of divine love and gives it flesh and blood.

It puts love into the form of a leader, stooping to wash the dusty feet of his friends.

It puts love in the form of a teacher, sitting on a hillside turning the old rules upside down.

It puts love into the form of a man, who stood to face death rather than shrink for proclaiming God's racial vision for our world.

Jesus shows us what God's love is.

Love is not just something God says.

Love is something God does.

Jesus is the language of God's love.

But today's passage does not merely lift up Jesus as the language of God's love so that we can see this beautiful gift and feel grateful for it.

The verse continues.

“We ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

Love is something we are meant to do too.

Not just something to say.

But something to do.

Being a Christian means that we too are called to make our very lives speak God's love to the world.

What is the language of your faith? How do you bring God's love to life through your life?

What are the ways that you live so that God's love takes human form?

How does your faith and your love take action?

Is service the language of your faith? Do you bring God's love to life by caring for your neighbors, by volunteering your time in service to God's people and God's creation?

Is prayer and contemplation the language of your faith? Do you bring God's love into the world by the power of your spirit, by sitting still and journeying

deep into the heart of God so that you can bring stillness and peace to a noisy and rushed world?

Is justice the language of your faith? Do you cry out like the prophets of Israel, and the great prophets of our social movements past and present? Do you fight racism? Resist evil in the world with the power of your voice?

Is study the language of your faith? Do you strive to learn everything you can about the world, and think about every thing you can? Do you plumb mysteries in search of truth in order to be met again and again with awe?

Is care the language of your faith? Do you offer tender love and hospitably to God's children as you meet them one by one.

Or is art the language of your faith? Do you make music, or paintings, or take photos, seeking to create something beautiful to mirror the beauty of God and push back some of the ugliness of violence and war.

And of course we are not any of us all-or-nothing. We live our faith in many ways. But for most of us, one of these forms takes center stage.

One of the things I love about this church is that we speak all these languages, and so many more.

If we all lived our faith the same way, we would only know a small sliver of God's love. But as it is we live this whole mosaic.

Like a great orchestra, where we can each find our part.

What is the language of your faith?

For we know God's love by this, that Christ laid down his life for us.

Let us love then, not just in word or speech, but in truth and action.

Justice is the love language of faith.

