

“Living the Faith: Extravagant Love”

Luke 6:27-36

May 5, 2019

“Can Love Be Taught?” This is the title of an article that was published by the Harvard Graduate School of Education back in 2014. This article explores how schools across the country can help better prepare young people to engage in mature loving relationships with others. According to psychologist Sigmund Freud, there are only two things that matter the most in life: work and love. And as this Harvard article argues, today’s society – especially in the United States – devotes a staggering amount of attention to how people ought to be educated in different subjects as a way of preparation for career success. But when it comes to educating young people on how they ought to love others, then the resources, attention, and preparation are simply not there.

For example, a high school student told the New York Times reporter Laurie Abraham the following: “as a society, we always tell kids, ‘work hard, just focus on school, don’t think about boys or girls – you can worry about that stuff later in life, it will work itself out,’ but the thing is, it doesn’t. It never does.”

There is no wonder why we are surrounded by constant failure in romantic relationships. We usually postpone teaching about love when we feel the “time is right”. Adolescence tends to be the “perfect” season in life for these conversations. But honestly, we never get to it. Or if we do, it tends to be too late - at that point, we have already experienced the consequences of not knowing how to love. Sometimes even just the thought of telling your sibling, child, or friend about how to love makes us nervous and uncomfortable. But avoiding these kinds of conversations is creating a real crisis.

The consequences of not knowing how to love, this Harvard article communicates, are indeed very costly to each and every one of us. Troubled relationships have very visible side effects such as alcoholism, workaholism, domestic abuse, unfaithfulness, divorce, depression, and constant irritability and misery. Not knowing how to love compromises our ability to flourish as human beings and it keeps us from truly being happy.

So, if the consequences to this very present issue are so loud and clear, why aren’t we addressing it?

It seems that we try our best at portraying what love is through movies, poetry, music, novels and so on. But these illustrations only capture one aspect of love, which is: we choose to love the person that we want to love. The plots and examples presented by these various forms of media always focus on two characters

choosing each other to share love with. If you happen to be married to someone or if you are in a romantic relationship, odds are you chose to be with that person so you could share and show love. And of course, if you are in a relationship that means that such person chose you back.

It seems that we have the freedom and autonomy to choose the person that we want to love, right?

That is the point where we find the main controversy about love – that we think we have the power to choose who deserves our love and who doesn’t.

We are taught from a young age that we always get to choose what and who we want to love. We are told by our parents and our friends that if we do not really love something or someone, we should just move on and leave such person or thing behind. If you don’t love your job, then quit. If you don’t love those jeans, then get rid of them. If you don’t love your house, then find a new one. If you don’t love your siblings, then you don’t have to see them. And the list goes on and on.

But I’m afraid that such mentality is rather a universal misunderstanding.

Since we have the freedom to choose the person that we want to be in a romantic relationship with, we thus assume that we also have the same freedom and autonomy to choose the people that we think deserve our love.

This romantic kind of love that we get to choose and therefore share with whoever we want the Ancient Greeks called Eros. But Eros was understood to be simply a part of the most extensive and universal kind of love known as Agape. Jesus is the main character in the New Testament who uses Agape love when referring to the love he has for everything and everyone in this world.

Therefore, when we think about how to love the world and everyone else, we must avoid trying to use this romantic kind of love mentality. We must realize that we have to stop choosing who deserves to be loved. Through the life and death of Jesus Christ, we come to understand that love has never been about choosing, but about freely giving to all. And most importantly, we must realize that this Agape love that we are called to share is no ordinary love - it is an extravagant kind of love.

Not surprisingly, the Apostle Luke uses the term agape when

writing about loving our enemies. For the Apostle Luke, the kind of love one must have for enemies is not a love that we share and show only when we choose to do so, but rather it is a love that we must always have at all times in all places.

And the Apostle Luke is very explicit about this when he writes: “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.”

Those compelling words point our attention to the crisis in which we live now. We show love only when it is convenient for us. We only love those who love us back. We only do good towards those who do good to us. All of us, at one point or another, have done that because that is the kind of love that we see happening in the world.

Love is no longer given freely to anyone. Love has a price. In order to receive love, one must give love. It has become a transaction. Love abides within the capitalistic notions of society – in order to get it, you must work for it and pay its price. Otherwise, forget about it. You’ll never find love.

But is that what the Apostle Luke is saying to us this morning? Is that what God has given us through Jesus Christ? No. Absolutely not.

The truth of the gospel proclaims that the kind of love we must have for everything and everyone must be a love that goes beyond merit and worthiness. It is a love that embraces everyone for who they really are. It is a love that forgives, nurtures, and transforms.

It is an “extravagant” kind of love because it is a love that even loves enemies.

But who are our enemies? Most likely, we have in mind those people who have mistreated us or those who have caused some form of harm to us or a loved one. An enemy tends to be the person or group of people who do something against us.

However, we have now reached a point in society in which the divisions among us have become larger and stronger. As a consequence, the term enemy has adapted to now include those who find themselves on the opposite side of the spectrum of a current issue. Our enemies no longer include only those who cause direct harm towards us, but also includes those who have different views and opinions from us – different backgrounds, different cultures, different religions, different political views.

Perhaps the term enemy sounds rather severe, but we must come to the realization that the division in which we now live has truly pushed us to treat each other as enemies – we mistreat each other, we ignore each other, we fight with each other, we find little regard for each other’s lives. And on top of all that, based on that notion, we must realize that we do indeed live among our

enemies. We go to school with them; we got to work with them; we play sports with them; we even come to church with them.

So, how can we coexist with each other? Only through an extravagant kind of love, my friends.

This is exactly what the Apostle Luke wants us to understand. Coexisting is possible. Harmony is possible. Unity is possible. Friendship is possible.

All these things are possible when we love each other beyond choosing who deserves it – all these things are possible when we embrace an extravagant kind of love for each other.

If you are ever in doubt about what this kind of extravagant love looks like, I invite you to think about the kind of love that God has for you: a love that that is patient and kind; a love that does not envy and never becomes proud; a love that is not selfish but always looking out for the other; a love that forgives and restores; a love that protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres even in the darkest days.

Love others the same way God has loved you. Love others with the same kind of extravagant love that God has shown you and shared with you.

The Harvard article proposes a solution for the issue of not knowing how to love. The article expresses that we do not know how to love because no one is really teaching us how. If you don’t have a teacher, learning something becomes considerably harder. Of course, the article proposes a robust solution on how to incorporate this kind of teaching in schools and colleges.

Ultimately, the crux of the solution is: we must intentionally teach how to love the younger generations and each other whenever is possible.

When we come to the realization that God has loved us and continues to love us in such an extravagant way, then the only way we can respond to such love is by teaching it to others.

Teach this extravagant kind of love.

Teach it when you are at home. Teach it when you go for a walk or an adventure. Teach it at your dinner table and when you are invited to someone’s else house. Teach it first thing in the morning and as you prepare to go to sleep. Teach it today, tomorrow, and always.

Amen.