

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: LOVE

Lesson: Romans 13:8-14

*<sup>8</sup> Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup> Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. <sup>11</sup> And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. <sup>12</sup> The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. <sup>13</sup> Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. <sup>14</sup> Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

The theme of today's sermon is love. One of the most frequently heard phrases in our church is "love one another." Love is at the core of our faith, the essence of our church, and the essence of Christianity. Many of you have lived longer than I have, have more experience, and more wisdom, so if someone were to ask you to speak about love or preach about love, you might be able to share a more excellent message than I can.

Nevertheless, today's sermon is all about love. While the lectionary suggested Romans 13:8-14 as the scripture passage for today, the reason our sermon focuses on love is because, even though we know what love is and have learned about it, many times we struggle to put love into practice in our lives. One thing we should all pray and ask God for, above anything else, is to allow the heart of love to dwell within our hearts.

John 13:35 says: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." This statement is of great importance. God's children and disciples are those who faithfully follow God's commandments. Keeping God's commandments includes not only "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and various other commandments, but among them, the most crucial commandment is "Love one another." This is because the command to love one another encompasses all the other commandments. Verse 8 says:

"Whoever loves others has fulfilled the law." If we claim to be God's children

while failing to love others, if we claim to be saved while not loving one another, then it is not a truthful claim. If we do not love others while professing our salvation, it is a misconception.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 13:8, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another." We should be able to give love to others and, at the same time, we should know how to receive love from others. Love is a concept very different from "transactions." Transactions involve an exchange where we give something of value in order to receive something in return. In fact, we are quite familiar with transactions. However, love is different from transactions in that when we give love to someone, our focus is on giving without expecting something in return. Love is giving without expecting compensation, and love is forgiving without expecting anything in return.

When we think about the love within families, parents love their children simply because the children are precious and lovable, not because parents want something in exchange for feeding, clothing, and taking care of them.

A poem I found goes this way:

Mom, why do you love me?

Well.. Just because.

Sweetie, why do you love me?

Well.. Just because.

Friends, Do you know that when we believe in Jesus, we are all one family in Christ? We are God's family. Ephesians 2:19 says, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household." Everyone who believes in God is one family. We are all part of God's family. When we realize that we are all God's family and one united family, the church community becomes truly remarkable.

Friends, what do you do when your family does something wrong? Do you spread it to others? Do you gossip about it behind their backs? No, we don't. Instead, we strive to protect and safeguard our family. Of course, when our family makes a mistake, we may guide them in the right direction, but we don't criticize them in front of others, spread rumors, or gossip about them.

In the same vein, if our church community feels and treats each other as God's family, when a member of our church community does something wrong, we won't

engage in spreading negative rumors or gossiping behind their backs. Instead, we will embrace them, offer assistance, and guide them in the right direction.

If we genuinely regard the members within our church community as brothers, sisters, parents, and children, we will be able to experience the Kingdom of God that Jesus spoke of here on earth. However, if we find that the members within our church community do not feel like family and continue to feel like strangers, we should pray for God to pour His love into our hearts and open our eyes, hearts, and souls to one another.

Our earthly families can only stay together for a limited time, perhaps around 100 years at most. But God's family is all about being together forever. It's the real deal. To be a part of God's family, His children, and true Christians, we just need to understand this and treat each other like family. When we come together in our church community with this attitude, it's like creating a piece of heaven right here. Heaven isn't some far-off place. The Kingdom of God isn't distant. It's here when we truly believe in Jesus Christ, love each other sincerely, and genuinely see and feel each other as family. Then, heaven is already among us in our community.

Throughout our lives, we experience a wide range of events. Sometimes, we go through sad moments, and at other times, we face challenges that seem hard to bear. However, when our community of faith is a loving one, resembling a family of God, we can support each other, pray together, and endure any difficulties that come our way.

Friends, Christians are those who follow God's commandments. Among these commandments are "Do not murder," "Do not commit adultery," "Do not steal," and others. However, even if we keep these commandments, if we do not love one another, if our hearts lack love, then our compliance with the commandments becomes meaningless.

You may have heard the term "legalism" before. What is legalism? During the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were prominent examples of legalists. But the problem was, they didn't show much love. Even though they were super strict about obeying the rules, they didn't love people very well. Instead, they often pointed fingers and found fault in others.

Legalism is something we should be most cautious about on our faith journey. Legalism without love can hurt the people around us. Romans 13:9 says,

"Whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" We should keep this in mind.

Today, you've come to worship God, probably because you want to strengthen your faith and follow God's teachings better. You're doing great! However, if we don't have love in our hearts, we might unintentionally hurt those who didn't come to worship, judging them based on attendance. Attending Sunday worship and giving offerings are crucial, but if we lack love in our hearts, what's the point of our worship and offerings?

Romans 13:10 says, "Love does no harm to a neighbor." We should strive to keep God's commandments while also loving one another. If we do this, we won't cause harm to others; instead, they will experience and witness God's love and grace through us. However, if we keep God's commandments but lack love for one another, if we don't love others, we end up causing harm to our neighbors, hurting them in the process.

Parents are often the ones who give the most love to their children, but at times, they can also become a source of hurt. There is a famous American philosopher named John Dewey, who has inspired many people. He didn't believe in God, but ironically, his parents were devout Christians. Later, when John explained why he became an agnostic, he mentioned that his parents attended worship faithfully and were actively involved in church activities. However, he was disappointed to see that, despite their faith, they didn't love others as they should have, which ultimately led him to leave the church.

Friends, love is the most important thing. If we were to summarize the Bible in one word, it would be love. In one sentence, it would be "Love one another." Even if we faithfully follow God's commandments, attend Sunday worship, and actively participate in church activities, if we do not love one another, if there is no love in our hearts, then everything becomes meaningless. Love means not doing harm to our neighbors. Love means not seeking anything in return. Therefore, love fulfills the law.

I pray and hope that all of us can love one another. I pray that God opens our hearts so that we can love each other. Amen.