

Love - November 14, 2010

This week, on Thursday Michelle and I got to go out and have a special treat, we got to go out to dinner at the Keg. We had a gift card left over from our Anniversary and so we got to splurge and go out to the Keg on Thursday night. Of course, we both ordered steak because that's what you do when you go to the Keg. The million dollar question they always ask you when you order your steak is "how do you want that done?" And so, this morning I thought what I would do, last week we started with a quiz, this week we're going to start with a survey. I'm going to go through some things here and when it applies to you, you put up your hand and we're going to answer that question "how do you like your steak done?" I did some research this week and I found that there is basically six different degrees of doneness, when it comes to steak. And these are the six official ones, there's a few kind of local ones like "Chicago style" is apparently is charred black on the outside. And I thought "that's great, next time I'm barbequing and get a little absent minded and it gets a little overdone I can just say "It's Chicago style, it's okay, I meant to do that". But there are these six basic ones that steak houses usually go by. So when we come to the one that applies to you, I'm going to ask you and you go ahead and put up your hand if this is how you like your steak done and we'll just see what our preferences are here.

The first one is called "blue rare" and blue rare is just when they throw it on long enough to brown the outside on both sides and the inside is actually still cool. Anyone in the blue rare category? No I didn't think so. So, we move up a little bit and we go to "rare" which is basically just the outsides get cooked and the inside is all red, but it's warm. Anyone order rare? Oh, a couple people order rare. Okay, good. Moving on to "medium rare". Medium rare is, we've already got some medium rare. Okay you guys are going to like this then because as I read, everywhere I read the official steak connoisseurs said that "medium rare" is the perfect way to order your steak. That's where it's, I think is about 50% red and 50% cooked. They said that is the perfect way you want to do your steak. Then you move up from there to just "Medium". Who orders medium? That's about 25% red in the middle, the rest is all cooked. "Medium well" we're getting close to just a sliver of pink in the middle. Some of you medium well. Then the last one, of course "Well done". Brown all the way through. One article I read said "that's a good way to ruin a great steak". I don't know if you agree with that, but that was the thing.

I was coming in to work on Friday and I was channel surfing on the radio and I came to old 80's song by Tina Turner that says "What's love got to do with it?" And I imagine some of you are sitting there right now thinking "What has this got to do with love?" Well, I'm going to explain it to you here. We went through that for a reason. Everyone has their own preference for how they like their steak done. As we went through that, if you were looking around, there were hands up for everything, almost

everything, not the blue rare, but everything else. There were some people who kind of like it this way, some people like it that way. There's kind of this whole spectrum of how we like to have our steak done. And some people say "Well, I prefer to have my steak, well done, as opposed to bloody and bleeding on my plate. I don't like that." And then there's other people who say, "Well I like my steaks "tender" as opposed to like "shoe leather" and so I get my steak cooked a little more rare. And so there's this whole spectrum when it comes to that and when we start talking about love, there's actually a very similar spectrum that exists when we talk about love. You have the people who are on one end and they say "you know what, I believe in tough love." And they look at the people down at the other end of the spectrum and say "I believe in tough love, not that kind of bleeding heart sort of thing down there." And then you have the people down at the other end of the spectrum and they say, "You know what, I believe in being tender hearted, not that kind of cold hard hearted kind of thing that the people at the other end of the spectrum seem to adhere to.

And so, when we start talking about love, really the big challenge for us is, "How do we all get along when we all exist on different parts of this spectrum, when we all have a different kind of view of what love is really supposed to be". We probably all agree that love is good and we should all be loving but that means different things to different people and so, how do we all get along and all exist in this different parts of the spectrum? And it's interesting because people on both ends of that spectrum, whether you are on the tender-hearted end over here or you are on the tough love end over here. People on both sides of that can pull out, actually, a good number of scriptures that would say "you know what, the bible supported view of love is "tough love" or the bible supported view of love is "tender hearted" love. And so, we have this question and lots of times people say "You know what, the Old Testament is tough love and the New Testament is that tender hearted love. But actually, if you read you can find stories for both in both halves of your bible. And so, how do we harmonize this? How do we get along? How do we co-exist when we're trying to live in community together and be the Church? How do we co-exist with these different kind of views of love? When you are trying to get along and live in your family and you have these different kind of perspectives on what love should be like. How do we get along? How do you co-exist with people at work, or at school, or at the Mall, or at the hockey rink, or wherever you are when we have these different perspectives and ideas about what love should really be.

So this morning we're going to try and tackle that a little bit and see how we do. And we're going to start simply by looking at both sides of the equation and we'll begin with the "tender hearted" side and a story out of Mark, Chapter 8, starting in verse 22:

"They arrived in Bethsaida and some people brought a blind man to Jesus and they begged him to touch the man and heal him. Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. And then, spitting on the man's eyes He laid his hands

on him and asked “Can you see anything now?” The man looked around and said “yes, I see people but I can’t see them very clearly, they look like trees walking around.” Jesus placed His hands on the man’s eyes again and his eyes were opened. His sight was completely restored and he could see everything clearly.”

Now, do you want to know what my first question is when I read that story? Now some of you will be asking why He spit in his eyes. And I don’t know the answer to that one. But my question is “how did the blind man know what trees looked like?” Have you ever thought of that? How did he know what trees look like? He said “there’s people but they look like trees.” I don’t know how he knew what trees look like or what people looking like trees would look like but that was my first question as I read this story. But this story, I think, can be a great illustration to us about what it means to be tender hearted.

I want to try something here this morning. I want everyone to look at me. Look directly at me, right in my eyes if you can do it, focus right in on me and don’t move your eyes until I tell you to. Now looking directly at me, I want you to answer, in your head, these three questions. Don’t look away. These three questions. How many plants are on the stage? Number 2, still look at me. How many of the plants on the stage have flowers? And number 3, still looking at me. What colour are the flowers? Okay. Look at me. How many plants on the stage? How many have flowers and what colour are the flowers? Okay. Now you can look and check your answers. Now I don’t know how you did at that, the correct answer is: 4 plants, one has flowers and they’re white. Okay? Now I don’t know how you did on that but we’ve been in here this morning for over an hour and you’ve been, for the most part, facing this way, looking, generally at the stage, looking at these flowers. These plants have been here for I don’t know how long, long as I’ve been here. These plants have been on the stage, basically in the same configuration. But generally, we just kind of ignore them. They’re just kind of part of the scenery. They’re backdrops. They’re props. They’re just kind of here. And I think we kind of do the same thing with people. Like the man in the story said “I can see people but they’re just kind of trees walking around” They’re just part of the scenery, they’re just part of the backdrop, part of the environment. We kind of get into this mode where people around us are often just kind of “window dressing”. They’re just the supporting cast to our story as we go around and live our life. We kind of have this sense that you know, when you walk out of the room the people in the room kind of disappear and then when you walk back into the room they just reappear as far as your perception and your mindset goes.

A movie came out several years ago called “The Truman Show”. And it was about this guy and he didn’t know it but he was in this scene where his whole life was a story and his whole world was a set and a sound stage in a studio and all the people around him, everyone around him was an actor or an actress and everything that happened was scripted and it was all on T.V. Unbeknownst to him, everyone was watching this

on T.V. So, he would go around and everyone would do their thing while he was around them and then, every now and then you catch a glimpse of, he would move on and the people who were in the next room after he left, well they'd stop and they'd sit down or they'd have a coffee or they'd do whatever, because Truman's out of the scene and so they are no longer on duty. When he came back in, they would jump to their feet and start, you know, doing what they were supposed to do, again. Every now and then Truman would do something unpredictable and he would leave and then come back quickly and everyone would be like "Oh no, we have to rush to our places because we're not doing what we're supposed to do." And we kind of have this sense sometimes as people, that, that's kind of how the world works. I mean, we won't necessarily come out and say it, but we kind of function that way. That the world is just kind of this space around me and people functioning around me and when I leave, that just kind of all fades into the background, into the scenery. The problem is, that doesn't just happen when we leave the room. Sometimes when we're in the room with people, when we're side-by-side and toe-to-toe and face-to-face with people, we still kind of carry with us this sense that they're just kind of part of the background, part of the scenery and we start to think of people like, that's just, that's only the guy sitting next to me at church. Or that's only the car in front of me in traffic. It's only the cashier at Wall Mart or it's only the woman next door, or it's only the guy in the cubicle next to me. And the problem with all that is, that no one is an "only" in God's eyes.

And so, Jesus touches the man's eyes again and he sees everything clearly. You see, tender heartedness is about opening our eyes to those around us. Opening our eyes to who they are and where they're at and what's important to them and why they do what they do. And that kind of perception and insight is called "Empathy". And empathy is often described as "Walking a mile in someone else's shoes". That's what empathy is. You know, walk in my shoes for awhile. That's what empathy is all about. But I kind of think that, that description of empathy might actually be a little bit too limited for us.

Some of you may remember an old T.V. show called "Quantum Leap". It was about this scientist who was trying to time travel, I think. Something went wrong and so the whole plot of the story is that this guy leaps from one time to another from one place to another and actually leaps into other people's lives. To everyone else, he looks like that person and he talks like that person, everyone thinks that he is that person, but he's really still him. And he has to solve some major crisis in their life and when he does, then he leaps on to the next person.

Well I think sometimes our idea of empathy is like Quantum Leap. We just, you know, we just leap into their lives and it's us in their life trying to fix their problem. But the problem with that is that, empathy is not about doing. Empathy is not about what I would do if I was you. Or about, what you could do if you were me, in your situation. Empathy is all about "how I would feel if I was you". And there's a distinct difference

about what I would do if I was you, and how I would feel if I was you.

For example, take the food we're collecting for the Friendship Inn. The people who will take advantage of that. If we consider them these people who come to the Friendship Inn and get their meals, we could probably come up with some things and say "Here's what I would do if I was them. Here's how I might help my situation if I was them. Maybe I could go back to school. Or maybe I could get some job training, or maybe, you know, I could find some way to improve myself or improve my situation and kind of rise up the ladder a little bit and it might be tough and it might be difficult, but I'd stick with it until my income rose and then I'd kind of move up the ladder a little bit. That's what I could do if I was in their shoes." But when you empathize, you say "I wonder what it would feel like to have been raised in an abusive family? I wonder what it would feel like to have been kicked out on to the street at 12? To have a child at 16? To have no job and to have no way of paying my own bills? I wonder what it would feel like to know that I'm on welfare and I want to get off welfare, but I know that to get off welfare I have to get a job but with my skills and experience, I can't get a job that's going to pay me more than the child care expenses I'll incur. I wonder what it would feel like to feel so trapped and so stuck and so frustrated with not being able to do anything? Do you see the difference?"

When we say "what I would do in your shoes" when we look at someone who is in financial trouble and we could say "you know what, If I was in their shoes, here's what I'd do. I'd get a budget and I'd stick to my budget. And it may be tough and it may be lean for awhile, but I would do that. And I would pay off my debt as quick as I could and I would try and find extra income where I can. And that's what I would do. It might be tough but I'd stick it out and then we'd get to a solution down the road. That's what I would do if I was in your shoes." But, empathy says "I wonder what it feels like to be in a spot where you have to choose which bill you are going to pay this month. I wonder what it feels like to have your kids come to you and say 'Mommy, daddy, I want to do this. My friends are playing this game, they're going to this place'. And not have the money to let your kid go. I wonder what it feels like to be so frustrated, wanting to make more money to help your family out but always applying for jobs and never being able to land one. I wonder what that feels like? Do you see the difference?"

Empathy doesn't ask "What would I do in your shoes?" Empathy asks "How would I feel, if I was you?" And here's the part that's going to really blow your mind. God empathizes with you. And when God empathizes with you, He doesn't just sit up there and look down at your situation and say "Here's what you could do to get out of that. Here's what you could do to improve your situation. Here's what you could do to make your life better". No, God looks at your situation and He says "I know how it feels. I know what you're going through. I know what your situation is doing to you, how it is stressing you out and how it is burdening your heart. I feel what you feel

about your situation.”

One person said “Empathy is when your pain is in my heart”. We are called to be tender hearted because God is tender hearted. In Eph. 4, Paul says:

“Instead be kind to each other, tender hearted, forgiving one another just as God, through Christ, has forgiven you.”

To love like God is to love in a tender hearted way. In Col. 3:12-14, Paul writes this, he says:

“Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourself with tender hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Bear with one another. Forgive anyone who offends you. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Over all these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Paul encourages the Christians to be tender hearted and then he says: “I want you to bear with one another”. And often when we read that phrase “bear with one another” the first thing that comes to mind, at least to my mind, is those situations if I’m going to bear with you it means I’m going to grit my teeth and bite my tongue and try not to react in any super negative way towards you. That’s how I’m going to bear with you. But actually, bear with you, contains a broader sense to it. Actually “bear with you” means “I’m going to help you carry what you are carrying. I’m going to share your burden”. And when Paul says “bear with one another” he’s not just saying, put up with each other as long as you can, he’s saying “carry the load together, share the burden of your neighbour.” Jesus Himself said “Come to me all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, let Me teach you because I am humble and gentle of heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28 - 30) To love like God is to be tender hearted.

Now let’s go to side two. Tough Love.

I’m going to share with you some things, some phrases, some statements that Jesus made, since Jesus is our example I figure that’s a good place to start. Here are a few things that Jesus said to some people called the Pharisees.

“Woe to you, you teachers of the law. You hypocrites. You claim the outside of the cup and the dish but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You are like a white-washed tomb, which looks beautiful on the outside but on the inside is full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. You snakes. You brood of vipers. How will you escape being condemned to Hell?”

Jesus dishes out some tough love to the Pharisees. And you don't have to read much of the New Testament to know that Jesus and the Pharisees didn't get along. They butted heads a lot. And you know that the Pharisees really hated Jesus with a passion. They were out to get Him. But here's something that I don't often think of. And it struck me this week that Jesus loved the Pharisees. Have you ever thought about that? Jesus loved the Pharisees. Now, we saw He spoke some hard words to them sometimes. He got annoyed with them. He got frustrated with them, he even got angry at them in some moments. But Jesus loved them. And all the stern words and all the calling to account that He gave and all the times that He took them to task over things, the things that He took them to task over were all true. And they needed to hear it. You see, Jesus was modeling tough love for us. And not just with the Pharisees but Jesus modeled tough love even to His own disciples. Several times as you read to the Gospels, He will turn to His disciples and say "Why do you have such little faith?" And He even turned to Peter once and said "Get behind me Satan because you have the things of men in your heart not the things of God". And when the occasion called for it, Jesus was more than ready to exhibit tough love.

Now we don't really like tough love, most of us but let me give you an analogy that might help make it more palatable, maybe. Imagine that we went hiking together, just a few of us, and as we were hiking, you fell and you broke your leg. When you broke your leg you actually severed, what's called the femoral artery, which is the main artery in your leg. If something doesn't happen to address that, you will bleed out and you will die before we can get you any help. And so, I look at you and I say "Here's what's going to happen" and I'll try not to make this very gross for those of you who don't like these sort of things. But, here's what needs to happen, I'm going to have to take my hand and put it inside your leg and I'm going to have to grab that artery and I'm going to have to hold it closed so that the blood doesn't keep coming out. We're going to have to do that until we can get help, and it's going to hurt, a lot. And when I do it, you're going to want me to stop and you're going to hate every minute of it. But this is what you need to have happen." That is what tough love says. Tough love says "I know you don't want me to, and I know it hurts, but this is what you need." When you see someone who is making bad choices. Someone who is developing bad habits. Someone who is putting themselves into risky situations. Someone who is starting to neglect their family. Someone who is treating other people poorly. Then tough love is required.

Here's what Bhil Hybells says about these types of situations: "Once you see something like that going on, somebody has to get close to these people and tell them that they are on a merry-go-round going nowhere. Someone has to shake them and say "God has a better way for you. Get off the merry-go-round and go and look for His direction. Somebody has to say 'I love you too much to watch you shipwreck your life, your marriage, your family, your job, your soul.' So sit down and listen to me, because I'm going to say some hard things to you and I don't like to do this, but I have to.

These things are true and I love you too much, to stay silent when I see you hurting yourself". That's what tough love is all about.

Paul says this: "Stop telling lies, let us tell our neighbours the truth for we are all parts of the same body, instead we will speak the truth in love growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of the body, the Church." (Ephesians 4:25,15) To love like Jesus is to exhibit tough love when needed.

But a word of caution. Before you proceed dispensing tough love. Make sure these two things are true.

1. Make sure that you value the well being of the other person more than the comfort of your relationship. Because, when you display tough love the comfort of the relationship is going to change a little bit for awhile. But, if you value the well being of the other person more, that's okay, you can push through that. And,

2. The second and perhaps most important. Before you go the "tough love" route make 1,000% sure that you are acting for the benefit of the other person. And make sure that 0.001% of your motivation is about anger or spite or pride or pay back. Too many people have been bruised and broken and scarred, all in the name of tough love, when it was all about being tough and nothing to do with love.

Tough love, tender heartedness. Those are the two sides of the spectrum. My wife has a love for Starbucks and she loves going there on her own, she loves when I go there on her behalf. Sometimes, tough love is required at Starbucks, because Mocha's are \$5.00 a pop and they're 500 calories a pop and both of those are way too much for a cup of coffee, that's not really good for you. So, sometimes tough love is required at Starbucks, to say "you know what, maybe we should skip the Starbucks today". But, sometimes, she's had a really lousy day, a stressful time at work, the kids are driving her up the wall. Things have just not been going well and she's having "one of those days" and on those days, tender heartedness takes me to Starbucks and gets a coffee. And you know this in your own life. Especially if you have kids. Oh, yes, the flip side of the story is that for me it's the Timbits at Tim Horton's and sometimes tough love is needed there, okay, usually tough love is needed there. You know this about love, if you have kids, you know that sometimes you have to have the tough love and hopefully more times you get to be tender hearted with them. If you are married, if you have friendships, if you have parents, if you have any contact with human beings, you know that sometimes you have to have tough love and sometimes you have to be tender hearted.

1Cor. 13, the passage that's on your bookmark, the passage that all of you know fairly well, whether you know very much about the bible or not, 1Cor: 13 is one of the passages that you probably hear a lot at weddings and whatnot. In 1Cor. 13 Paul

gives this great description of love and what love is and what love does and how important love is. Everyone really loves that passage. Everyone loves 1Cor. 13. We love to have it at weddings, we crochet it on the wall, we do all sorts, bookmarks, whatever. We love 1Cor. 13 as it talks about love. And really everyone loves a sermon about love. When a preacher looks at the schedule and sees “Oh, I get to speak on love next week, that’s a good week”, because you know that pretty much everyone is going to go away happy cause everyone loves to hear about love. And usually when you preach about love, my experience is, this is what happens. 10% of the people usually the most tender hearted 10% they will listen to the sermon and they will think “Wow, we really needed to hear that, I’m going to do a better job at loving people”. And the other 90% of us say, “Wow, we really needed to hear that, I hope everyone heard it and we start loving each other better”. That’s okay. As long as everyone wants to improve somehow, I think that’s good. But we all love to talk about love, we love sermons about love and it’s really hard to give a sermon on love and have people go away unhappy. But I’m going to give it a shot.

This morning there are really two halves to our sermon. The first one talked about tender heartedness and the second one talked about tough love. I don’t know which one it was for you but I’m guessing that probably this happened. For one of those halves of the sermon, you were sitting there going “Amen, right on”, you didn’t say it out loud, at least I didn’t hear you but you were thinking “Amen, right on, that’s good, I like that, I like what you’re saying we need to hear that more, we need to do that more, I’m really comfortable with this. I love it.”

And then the other half of the sermon, you were saying “Well, you made some good points there but, it’s kind of making me a little uncomfortable. I’m kind of squirming in my seat here a little bit and I’m uneasy and I don’t know where this is going on this half of the sermon.

And I don’t which half of it, it was for you, if it was the tender hearted half that you were a little uncomfortable with, you would be thinking something like this: “Well that’s all good but if we buy into that too much people are going to start to get soft and wishy washy and all that I’m okay, you’re okay, stuff and there will be no lines and nothing will be right and nothing will be wrong and it will just go down into chaos and I don’t like where that’s going”.

Now if you were the other side of the equation and if it was the tough love that was making you a little uneasy, you would start thinking thoughts like this: “Well, okay, but we don’t want to get too harsh, we don’t want to be judgemental, we don’t want to drive everyone away cause we’re always so critical of everything that everyone does”.

Now, we’re all at different places in that spectrum. Some will know that they’re on the tender hearted end. Some will know that they’re on the tough love end. Most of us

think that we're right in the middle with the perfect amount of both in our life. So here's the test for you this morning for where you are at. The half of the sermon that you felt good about, is the type of love that you're probably naturally predisposed to. That's kind of your default mode. It's the side of love that you're good at. The other half of the sermon, the half that made you squirm, is the side of love that you need to work on. That you need to get better at. You may not like that and you might resist it, you might object to it, but before you write that off altogether, notice this. Towards the end of 1Cor. 13, Paul adds this in:

“When I was a child I spoke and thought and reasoned like a child but when I grew up, I put away childish things.”

And could it be that Paul is suggesting that love is not some impulsive reactionary childish thing, but it is the grown up, hard worked, disciplined, nurtured, sometimes difficult, both tough and tender hearted care for other people. Because God's love for us is tender hearted when we need it to be and tough when we need it to be. If we want God's love to shine through us and warm the hearts of the world around us, we need to follow His example. Paul ends by saying:

“Three things will last forever. Faith, hope and love but the greatest of these is love”.

|