

November 13, 2022

John 13:34-35

# “The Stewardship of Yourself”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately and said, “Tell us, when will these things be [namely, the destruction of the temple], and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Like the believers of the past, we have Jesus’ promise that he will return. We are interested in getting all the details we can. Part of the answer that our Savior gave to his disciples about the end of the age was the following: “And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold (Matt. 24:12).” Like a blast of icy air that freezes water into snow or hail so will the love of most people in the church be chilled to death.

In his commentary on *Matthew*, M. J. Albrecht writes (pg. 344): “It is anything but a glorious future that Jesus foretells for his church on earth. All of this turmoil, confusion, and iniquity will in turn have another evil effect: ‘the love of most will grow cold.’ Jesus is talking about both our love for God and our love for one another. His words should give us pause ...” Indeed! We are living in a time where we are seeing this truth unfold before us on a global level.

My thoughts travel to the book of Revelation and a portion of the letter to the church in Ephesus: “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.” Have we fallen? Are we in need of repentance? All of this comes together as a powerful warning not to fall away from our first love in Jesus. All of this serves to the end of remaining in the warmth of Jesus’ love for us and our love for each other - even our enemies. Love is a fruit of faith and is about the giving of oneself to another. And so our theme: **“The Stewardship of Yourself.”**

Today we ask: How are you managing yourself? How are you managing your love for God and neighbor? Or, has your love grown cold? Perhaps we need to step back for just a moment to understand what makes love and keeps it warm so that we can know what warm love is toward God and others. In our gospel lesson Jesus says (John 13:34-35): “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Love is perhaps the most discussed human emotion. Songs are sung about it. Poems have been written about it and artists have done their best to capture it in a painting. Scientists try to analyze it. Entire books have been devoted to the subject. And yet, when you really think about it for a moment, love remains hard to define. It remains hard until it is defined by God in 1 John 4:10, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” That is how Jesus understood the stewardship of the self. That’s how Jesus loved us and that’s how we are supposed to love one another. Jesus managed himself to save us and to give us everything good!

This understanding of love makes all the difference in the world. Love is rooted in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins. He gave up himself for us. We must never forget that our being a Christian is

founded upon the Son of God who became one of us and obeyed the law on our behalf. We must never forget that he is the one who was, as the prophet Isaiah writes: "... pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed (53:5)." Now that's love and what love is for! It is the giving of oneself to another.

You probably now know what **The Stewardship of Yourself** is. If we love because Jesus first loved us, then what do you think our love is supposed to look like? It's supposed to look like the life and cross of Jesus. One Lutheran commentator writes: "Unless it flows from a believing knowledge of God's love for sinners in Christ, love is only a vague and unstable human emotion." Did you catch that powerful thought? Our love flows from a believing knowledge. We know that "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us," Paul so powerfully puts it in Romans 5:8. That means that when people are not nice to us, we are to love them with a love that is designed to save them, to release them from what is evil, and give them everything good! That is **The Stewardship of Yourself**.

And there is more to say. This love shapes a way in us that is reflective of Jesus' way toward us. We get a pretty good handle on this in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." We just love to see those verses on Hallmark cards and pretty pictures we hang up on the wall. But, do we believe it and live it? Is that how we really are toward each other and even our enemies? Are we so close to the love of Jesus that when we are around others it is as if his love has visited them through us? Maybe we should once again consider that command that was given to the church in Ephesus: "repent, and do the works you did at first."

If faith, the root of our love, is withered and is dying or is dead, we are bid to confess our sins that we may receive forgiveness and cleansing from all unrighteousness. If we have sinned we are to look to the one who speaks in our defense - Jesus Christ who is the righteous one - the atoning sacrifice. And such love that he gives to us, is to begin to bear fruit through us. The love that comes to us from the cross and empty tomb creates and sustains a "faith working through love ... (Gal. 5:6)." What is the look of love? How does it manifest itself in **The Stewardship of Yourself** as you consider your cheerful response to the Lord? Listen to these words of our epistle lesson: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18)."

A former missionary to India once told of needing assistance in transferring a critically ill man from his house to the local hospital. She requested help from two Hindu "holy men" who were sitting not far away, repeatedly and endlessly singing their devotions. She said that she would never forget the fire of resentment that blazed up in the eyes of one of them, as he replied: "We? We are holy men. We never do anything for anyone." What a twisted and dangerously false concept of holiness. Where is the love and the willingness to sacrifice? It would be easy for us to dismiss this incident as merely something found in non-Christians. But this kind of cold thinking can often be found in us when we are complacent. As our

Lutheran Confessions remark, “good works should and must be done, not that we are to rely on them to earn grace but that we may do God’s will and glorify him.

Throughout the Scripture there is a connection between faith in the one God who saves us, and our love toward him and one another and even strangers. It goes all the way back to Leviticus 19:33-34. There it is written: “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” Why do you love a stranger? Because God saw you living like a stranger in sin, death, and hell and saved you. Why should you love your enemies? Because you were once an enemy of God - hostile toward him - and he loved you anyway - so much so that he gave his Son. Why should we love one another? Because we were all once nothing, but now we have a common inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade away.

Love is the fruit of a living faith in Jesus. It only exists by the love of Christ. John writes in his first epistle that “anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love ... we love because he first loved us (4:8, 19).” As you can see, the one who believes that Christ has saved him loves the Father and others. Luther writes: “Faith ... is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. And so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question rises, it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them.” It is **The Stewardship of Yourself**.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott