

"Love in Christ" (topical)

For Your Life in Christ the Fourth Wednesday Service in Advent
December 21st, 2011

Saint Paul's Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

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Introduction: Our Self-Serving "Love"

- A. Jen Floyd Engel wrote for Fox Sports this past week on Kobe Bryant's divorce. It was one of the saddest column's I had read in a while and it reminded me of the recent Pew Forum release of the record low in our country: only about half of all adults in the U.S. are married. Marriage is dying. What does it mean?
- B. According to Engel the answer is simple: "we are a selfish species." She elaborated, "The truth is, marriage is hard work, the constant battle of me vs. we." (Kobe split ultimately a private affair, Fox Sports, Dec. 20th)
- C. Engel is smart and while the column was overwhelmingly pessimistic, I had to remind myself that Engel did not pursue the only thing that saves marriage. I think she was spot on in diagnosing the challenge: "me vs. we." Well said, so if this is the case, then we need God's answer to this conflict, namely "love."

Part I: Which Love?

- A. But love is one of those slippery concepts that should not be reduced to the Beatle's song, "All You Need Is Love." In this Advent series, we started with:
 - 1. **HOPE**: and saw the two kinds, one that is worldly and subjective; and the other that is objective connected to the saving work of Christ.
 - 2. Then we went on to consider **PEACE**: and saw that Christ said in some respects we would have no peace (Matt. 10:34f. that is contrary to the anti-war symbolism of the 60's "peace-sign"); but thanks be

- 3. to God Christ's blood was shed to purchase our peace with God. He is thusly "Prince of Peace."
- 4. Last week we looked at **JOY** and see that our joy is not the transitory happiness that depends on external circumstances, but the joy of knowing that no matter what, God blesses His children in Christ.

- B. In the case of **LOVE**, things are no different. ***We must define and qualify our terms!*** Love is not only the key to marriage, but the key to living in faith. Love and faith cannot be separated; we must know what kind of love we're talking about.

Part II: Christ's Love is Sacrificial and Puts Others First:

- A. As we prepare for Christmas, we see that Christ's love for us was sacrificial. This love means total commitment; it involves a renunciation of vainglory [living for self] and calls for resistance to persecution, which is a fiery test of the loyalty of love (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume, 8). Love is the resolution of faith.
- B. Gary Smalley is a Christian psychologist who fights for marriage and reflects this understanding of God's love in the title of one of his books: *Love Is A Decision*.
- C. Christ chose to love you Christian when you were still His enemy:

Romans 5:8: "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Conclusion: But why? Because in all of the virtues we've discussed thus far: hope, peace and joy, none of these are found in living for self. This is counter- intuitive to our sinful nature. We think that if we pursue our selfish desires at all costs that we'll be happy, but this is the delusion of the insatiable flesh. The truth is that God's love is in accord with His nature (God is love, 1st John 4:8 & 16) and in accord with His original intention for us: we were designed to love as God loves. Any other path leads to dysfunction, but through Christ, real love, lasting love is yours!