

What's Your Love Language?

Brenda and I have been reading though, "The Five Love Languages." It's mainly for couples, but not necessarily so. Parents, children, and friends can all learn a bit about how we and others give and receive love. The five languages Gary Chapman puts forward are: Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, and Physical Touch.

Some people want to hear their hard work is appreciated - not get nagged around, others want time to talk face to face – without the phones and distractions, others need a hug – not a simple word or two, others want flowers or a trinket to constantly remind them of affection whenever they see it, and others are filled up when they see someone willing to lend a helping hand when they need it – to walk the walk not just talk the talk. Now I think we can all appreciate these acts of love on some level, but Gary Chapman's point is that we all have one or two that really hit home with us. And if we recognize them, and our spouse's, we have just made the process of love so much simpler.

"I get her flowers, why doesn't she know I love her!" Because she wants to hear you say it. "I work so hard to provide for them, why don't they appreciate me!?" Because they would prefer you take a day off and spend it with them. "The spark in our relationship is gone! Are we even in love anymore?" The spark always fades, the butterflies fly away, that doesn't mean love does. Love is sacrificial giving for another, and these: words, actions, gifts, time, are all gifts we have to give and receive. It is love we have to give and receive.

But this is not a counseling seminar. This is a sermon. But, it just so happens, it was God who designed us to give and share love, he wired us this way. Even more, 1 John 4:19: "We love because he first loved us." And how amazing is this love of God. Love shown first in creation.

He made us. What a gift? To knit us together. Cells, sinews, nerves bundled together and then given so much more! Given life, breath, consciousness. We are us, by the love of God.

His love shines even brighter when compared to our imperfect love. We push him away, we prefer our greed and pride and lust. He gives us gifts of bodies, Adam has Eve, but we complain and wish them away, rename them, use them not in accordance with His design. And even our relationships that are in accordance with his will, how often do we say what we shouldn't, let our tempers rise, let that olive branch go untaken? We all stand condemned for "not loving our neighbors as ourselves."

And so what does God do to such unloving creatures like us? Does he wipe us out? And let's be clear, God is no pushover. He is the King, he will not let evil go unchecked forever, he will not let it go unpunished. But just as he is *just*, he is also *merciful*. And so he shows his great love in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He leaves his throne and comes here to this broken world to answer for evil and to dispense his mercy and love.

He knows all about love and, yes, he knows all about being unloved. He knows what betrayal feels like. He knows all about giving love and receiving hatred in return. He knows all about falling out of love. Do you think he had butterflies and whimsical fancy as the nails went in his hands? As he struggled for each breath? As he bled out and died? Yet was not that most inexpressible, inexhaustible display of love? Love is sacrificial, it gives of the self for the good of the other, and in this act of service God has given us such love. To take the punishment justice demands on himself that we might be free.

And the Lord, risen in victory, done with his sacrificial death, is not done dispensing his love. He is with us, present where two or more are gathered, present in Bread and Wine that we can

physically touch, an ear ever ready to listen at any time. Even more the Holy Spirit, the Helper Jesus has sent to be with us, present in His Word, and in the physical waters of baptism. That we might be kept safe in the ark of the Church until we receive the inheritance of life! What presence, what gifts, what love!

And in this Easter season we rejoice in it. We, like Paul who preaches to the people of Greece, rejoice in this God-of-all who has shown such love in making us and such power in his resurrection. We, like Peter in our epistle, rejoice in the victory he proclaimed to all and in his gifts that have brought us to share in that victory.

We rightly rejoice in those gifts, which is a great way, by the way, to say thank you to him, to show love back. What a great thank you for the child to open the present and smile wide! That joy in receiving the gift is a thank you in itself. So rejoice in the gifts God has given you. Sing those alleluias. Which is another way to say thanks: to say it, proclaim it! In song, in prayer, or, like Paul, to share the good news and gifts with someone else. But our Gospel lesson gives us one more way of saying – no - *showing* our thanks and love, “[Jesus said,] “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” I’ve bored some of you with the illustration before, I know, but I think it is fitting: If a soldier takes a bullet for his comrade, and his dying wish is that the comrade take a letter to his wife. Does the comrade, thankful for the soldier who saved his life, throw it in the trash? Or does he strive to deliver the letter? Likewise our Lord who has given his life for ours, who has shown such great love for us in his death, resurrection, sending of the Spirit, and presence in real ways. He has showered us with love in more languages than you can write a book about. How can we say thanks? How can we give love back from that which we have received? To do his will. I suppose Gary Chapman would call that an “act of service” love language. The Psalmist simply calls it the Lord’s Good Will that we meditate on day and night.

To try and do what he would have us do. To leave the debauchery, greed, and pride aside. To apologize, to give the best construction, to have compassion on others, to try and do things in open in honest ways, to honor the earthly gifts God has given not worship them or waste them. I mean, you get it. Those commandments and all they entail. They are not meaningless hoops to jump through. But ways given from God, the same God who wired us to give and receive love, to express love - not just toward God, but also our neighbor.

You won't find it in many Disney stories, perhaps, and it won't give you butterflies. But those commandments, the will of God, carried out are an expression of love, pleasing to God. How can we not lift up his good will as just that: good!? God our maker, God who is love, has given us these expressions of love, and ask the sociologist or the family counselor, when do people flourish? When love is expressed in real action. Real action that lifts up someone else's reputation, has a little respect for those in difficult callings, is content, not greedy, shares, doesn't threaten. How is that not someone you don't want to be around? And there is no better way to say thank you to that same God who loved us first.

Now, of course, we don't love perfectly, but God does. So when we fail let us go back to him, confess, and hear the wonderful absolution, that God has taken your sin, laid it brutally on the Son, but make no mistake that is an act of love. And the love of God is never ending. Like a candle that could light a thousand other lights and still not be diminished, our God is always there to dispense his love and forgiveness, and we can share it too, because we know where to get more of it. Right there at the cross. So let us rejoice as our Savior lifts the burden of our sin, kills it and rises again to offer us a share in that new life and love and empowers us to share that same love in our lives.