

Agape - 1 Corinthians 13

Norwalk Christian Church, June 30, 2019, Peacemakers - Camp Series, Proper 8, Year C

Marti and I are in the midst of a summer sermon series we're calling "Peacemakers." It's based on the themes that our youth are experiencing at camp this summer. Each day during a week of camp, they are exploring a different word from a different language or culture that gives new meaning and insight into what it means to be a "peacemaker."

Our word today is "Agape". It may be a new word for some of you--but it's a word I grew up on. From Kindergarten through middle school, I went to a tiny little school in my home church called "Agape Christian Academy."

Does anyone know what the word Agape means? Love! Agape is love.

And here's a slightly harder, follow up question...who knows what language Agape is? Greek!

This is a camp-themed series, so we need to get you talking like we do the kids at camp. There will be more later, so don't go to sleep.

Agape is a Greek word that means love, but it's not the only Greek word that means love. There are, in fact, three Greek words that mean love.

In English, we have just one, tired word for love. I love my mom. I love riding my bike. I love cheese. And I love my spouse.

One tired word, used to express how I feel towards Cheese and Marti. It's a lot of work for one word.

The Greeks--they may have been ancient, but their language was much more sophisticated than ours. And they realized that when it comes to love--there are four main aspects of it, so there should be four words.

The first is *Storge* - say that with me - *Storge*. *Storge* is love of possessions: I *storge* my car, I *storga* cheese, I *storge* my new iPhone.

And then there's *Eros*. It's the word for passion. Where we get our word "erotic." I told the kids at camp, *Eros* is that gross, kissy-face love. It's the kind that makes all the Junior Campers go "ewwwww".

(I have to tell you a quick story, one night at camp, we are down at Picnic Grove with the Junior Campers, and there is a group of kids off playing on a tire swing, and I walk over, and ask a boy over there, what's up. And he says, "These girls are weird." And I said, "oh,

really, why's that?" And he said, "They keep talking about what you taught us today. About that kind of love. Eros!" I said, "No, no, no--I did not teach you about Eros. Do not go home and tell your parents that Pastor Travis taught you at camp about Eros.")

Anyway, enough about Eros.

The third kind of love is *Philia*. Say that with me... It's where the city of Philadelphia gets its name, city of brotherly--sisterly love. It's the word for friendship love. But it can be even deeper than just basic friendship. It's the word used in Greek literature for the kind of camaraderie you have between soldiers. When you are in a battle together, a fight--when you overcome some sort of challenge with someone--you develop this bond. It's deep, it's real--it's a form of love. *Philia*.

And then there's the fourth kind of love--*Agape*. Christians have called this the "God-like love". In a Greek-English Lexicon, it says *Agape* is the love of God for humans and the love of humans for a good God. It is unconditional love. Love that is not earned or temporary. The way God loves God's creation. *Agape*.

It's the word in our passage today: *Agape* is patient. *Agape* is kind. *Agape* is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

Or, you could just say, God. *God* is patient. *God* is kind. *God* is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

As we proclaimed at the beginning of our worship, those truths from the book of 1 John, God is love. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love, does not know God, for God is love.

Or as Jesus told his disciples on the night he was betrayed, as he served them communion and washed their feet: They will know you are my disciples, if you have love, love for one another.

Agape. God's love for us--but more than that--*Agape* is our calling--this is how we are to love one another. *Agape* one another, Jesus said, for I have *Agaped* you.

Now, I had a little fun with the Junior campers, and I invited them up to help me demonstrate how *Agape* can be lived out. There are a lot of examples here in 1 Corinthians 13 on how to show *Agape*, but they are summed up in three basic actions, and I need four middle schoolers to come up here and help me. Any middle schoolers in the house today?

These middle schoolers are doing a local mission trip starting tomorrow. They will be sleeping two nights in our church, and going out around the Des Moines metro and doing various acts of service. They will be showing God's *Agape* with others.

So, I thought you should come up here and learn a little about what *Agape* is. And I'm going to have you demonstrate what it is through some acting. Can you do that.

Like I said, there are primarily three ways we can show *Agape*.

And the first is *Grace*. Let the whole church say that with me--*Grace*. *Grace*. *Grace* is giving someone what they don't deserve. Maybe they've wronged you, or maybe they just haven't earned a gift--but you give it anyway. *Grace* could be forgiveness. It could be returning a wrong with something positive. *Grace* isn't mercy. Mercy is not giving someone what they deserve--like they break the rules, they deserve punishment, and you don't give it to them. That's mercy. But *Grace*--*grace* goes farther. *Grace* is when they break the rules, they deserve punishment, but you give them a \$100 bill instead. Unconditional love. *Agape* is *Grace*.

Now, when I think of giving someone what they don't deserve, I think of Oprah. You remember her show--and she would have these shows, where she would give out all these gifts. So to act out *grace* for us, I want you to be Oprah, and I want you to point to these beautiful people, like you're saying, "You get a car, and you get a car, and you get a car." That's *grace*. Give it up for *grace*.

The second way we can express *Agape* is through compassion. Now, here, we need to do a little more Greek. The greek word for "compassion" is *spalgchnizomai*...say that with...ah never mind. That's too advanced for you. *Spalgchnizomai*--it's translated compassion. Like when we would say, "my heart is moved, or my heart breaks" when I see someone suffering. But for the greeks, they didn't talk about emotions in the heart. For them, the seat of your emotions was your gut. And the word literally means, to be moved in your bowels. To get sick to your stomach. When you have compassion for someone, your bowels move for them. It's a little gross.

So, to act this out, I need you to do a little dry heave, okay. I know this is church, but we're pretending like we're at camp. Just go with it.

Now, after I taught this to the Junior Campers, that night their family groups had to come up with a drawing to illustrate what *Agape* was, and--I kid you not--all four groups drew a picture of someone throwing up. I guess they learned something. One group drew two, one was the throw-up emoji, and the other was an emoji throwing up a rainbow, and they said, *Agape* is when you see your friend throwing up, and you throw up, too, because it makes you sad.

So, *Agape* is compassion!

Finally, this is less graphic, Agape is Reconciliation. Reconciliation is bringing pieces together. Healing wounds. It's like grace--but deeper. Agape repairs. God agapes us so much, that God became human, so that the divide between humanity and God could be healed, brought together.

So, to act this out, I want you two to do a little dance. Start far off, then pull each other close. That's reconciliation.

These things--grace, compassion, and reconciliation--these are what God does for us. And I think we probably all have a story for times when we've felt God's Agape love for us in these ways.

But these are also the ways we are called to love others. This is who we are to be as Christians. This is our calling. Agape--grace, compassion, and reconciliation.

Let's give it up for our lovely, middle-schooler volunteers.

This past week was the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots. Stonewall is seen as the birth of the LGBTQ rights movement. Stonewall was a nightclub in Greenwich Village in New York City. It was owned by the mob. And it was a place where people who were gay could quietly be themselves. The police knew about it, and they would routinely show up, threaten to "out" the people in the club if they didn't pay them a bribe. Then they'd be on their way.

But one night, 1:20 a.m. on Saturday, June 28, 1969, the police arrived for another raid. Usually they would tip off the club's owner, but not this night. They were crueler than usual. They made the patrons line up outside. A crowd began to gather. 100-150 people watch, many of them also gay. They started lining people up and putting them in paddywagons. Someone yelled out, "Gay pride". Another started singing "We Shall Overcome." Soon, a riot broke out. People threw beer bottles. They ran from the police. The police ran from them. There were reports of nickles being thrown, which a woman later told reporters was their way of protesting the bribes the police continued to make them pay.

It was a dark night. But it was a turning point. It was a point when the LGBTQ community stood up--where they said we need to be afforded the same rights as everyone else. A year from that day, in 1970, there wasn't a riot, but a parade--the Christopher Street Liberation Day. From there, the peaceful Pride movement was born, as the journey toward equality continued.

We've learned a lot as a culture in the last 50 years. We've learned a lot about tolerance, and acceptance, and community, and love.

And see, this is how it is with this Agape love. It's unconditional. You don't have to earn it. You can't earn a love like this. It's given, freely, to us--to all of us--everyone of us, all people because we are all Gods. And the calling is for us to do the same.

But let's be honest--it's hard. Throughout time, we've given out grace...but only to some. We've said you deserve grace, and you deserve compassion, and you deserve reconciliation--but not you, or you, or you.

Agape pushes us--it pushes us, always forward, to the edges of love. To a love so great, so beautiful, that it could push God to the very edge of heaven, where God could become human, to live and die among us, to show us what true love is.

Agape means we should stand tall, be proud of who we are, because God made us, and God loves us unconditionally.

Agape means that there is nothing--nothing--that you could ever do to earn God's love. God gives it, freely, unconditionally.

And Agape means that we, as God's people, Christ's disciples, should always strive to show that love to each other, and to the whole world.

There remains, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love. Because God is love, and wherever there is love, God is there. Amen? Amen.