

Victory of the Lamb – The New Year Revolution – The Investment of Love

1 John 3:16-20 – Pastor Bill Limmer

One Sunday morning a man transformed himself into a homeless person and went to a multi-thousand member church. He walked around the church for about 30 minutes while it was filling with worshippers. He greeted people only to be greeted back by stares, dirty looks and people looking down on him. Only a handful of people said hello to him. He asked people for change to buy food – no one in the church gave him any. He went into the sanctuary to sit down. He made his way to the front of the church only to be asked by the ushers to move to the back. As he sat in the back of the church he listened to the opening announcements. When that was done, the elders went up to the front and were excited to introduce the new pastor. “We would like to introduce to your next pastor,” the head elder said. The congregation looked around clapping with joy and excitement. The homeless man sitting in the back stood up and starting walking to the front. The clapping stopped with all eyes on him. He walked up to the altar and took the microphone from the elders (who were in on this). He said I want to share what Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” What do you think? If lack of love would have been an Olympic Sport they would have all received Team Gold. Apparently for the church goes it didn’t make sense to invest in their guest. Where did this lack of love all begin?

Our first parents were created in the image of God. They were perfect, beautiful. Just right. But Satan went on a hunt for the crown of God’s creation. He coaxed Adam and Eve with a fake picture of God, a picture that distorted God’s love and purpose for them. They believed the forgery and that changed everything. An example of the chaos this cost is now seen in our sinful nature. We are now by nature hostile to God. And one of the ways we see this image of God ruined is that our sinful nature is selfish. Me first. My standards above all. Today as we wrap our New Year Revolution series we want to see that because of Jesus we have hope – we aren’t lost cause, our identity is in Christ and not some label of failure, because of Jesus we are a community, each one of us is a part of the body of Christ, and purpose to believe in Jesus and to share Jesus. Today because of Jesus’ love we can become mirror images, reflections of Jesus to our family, friends, community and world. This change takes place as through God’s Word and Sacrament we see the generosity of Jesus’ unconditional love for us and for all people.

1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. Just think if Jesus was acting like a typical business leader. What would he have seen that says it is worth it to invest in them? Does it make sense? Christ said deep in his heart and full in his actions you are worth it and this even though he knows all about you and me. Jesus loves you and so he invested in you. You weren’t a side stock. You weren’t part of a diversifying his portfolio. You are what he was all in for. Jesus made sacrifices to forgive you and to make you a part of his family. For Jesus it was worth it to be ridiculed so that you might have strength when you are ridiculed. It was worth for Jesus to be all alone so that when you are all alone, you really aren’t. Jesus is with you in his presence and in his understanding. It was worth it for Jesus to lose everything for you and me so that we could be adopted into his family and have all of God’s storehouses. It was worth it to Jesus to go through a breath robbing life giving sacrifice so that you and I could be forgiven and have eternal life. It was worth it for Jesus to give up heaven so that you and I could have heaven. Jesus was all in even though we had nothing to offer him.

This what unconditional love looks like. God went first. God gave first. God gave before we ever confessed our sins. God gave and didn’t hold back. God demonstrates his love to us in this: while we

were still sinners Christ died for us. By nature, spiritually speaking, we are not a pretty picture. We are disheveled and deserving of absolutely nothing good. We chose the wrong path, made the wrong decision, and got involved in things that we should never have been close too. But that didn't stop Jesus from giving himself to us because He loved us. Jesus didn't come up with excuses not to invest his love in us. He didn't say he is too cocky, she is too whiny, he didn't learn his lesson, she did that again. Jesus love is unconditional. We are loved not based on our performance, but because we deserve, but based on who God is. God is love.

1 John 3:16-18 ¹⁶ **This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.** ¹⁷ **If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?** ¹⁸ **Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.** As you and I understand that there is nothing we can do to make God love us less or love us more it changes our life. You know what I mean? God's love liberates us from the fears and self-imposed expectations that weigh us down. Do you ever get weighed down by expectations? Me too. Jesus' love sets us free to be agents of love, not worrying about whether we get someone's approval to spend our love on someone in our own family or a homeless person or the cranky neighbor or the narcissistic co-worker or the person who made a mistake is now living for drugs. God now lives in the heart of every believer and his unconditional love starts to reflect out from us onto the heart-scapes of this world. When we reflect Jesus' love we don't keep a record of wrongs. When we reflect Jesus, we reach out in compassion to those who have nothing to offer us. When we reflect Jesus, we experience the joy of giving ourselves, time, talent and treasure to others.

Love is investing in others just like Jesus did in us. It is putting someone ahead of ourselves. Love is stepping into despair and disarray with compassion, empathy, and self-sacrifice. God knows first-hand that some people will reject your investment into their lives. Don't expect people to earn your love. We didn't and don't earn God's love either. Love demands nothing in return. The love of investing into others in need has an equation that no business ROI formula can figure out. This isn't mathematics this is spiritual. Every time we love it is a win over Satan.

Jesus shows us to be generous in love in every aspect of life. And you know what happens when we are loving, we become more like God: generosity is increased, materialism is defeated, selfishness is squashed, needs are met, joy is deepened and God is seen. Where in your life do you see God giving you opportunities to show his love, to be like Jesus! Maybe for you it is the local school. Maybe for you it is the Red Cross. Maybe for you it is the Lighthouse Youth Center. Wherever your gifts and passions intersect the needs of people that is a great place for you to be Jesus to others. People are dying to see Jesus. If what we want is for people to believe in Jesus, like Pastor Ben shared with us last week, the best way for this to happen is for us to share God's love and our love because that will open the door for conversations about Jesus.

Pastor Ben is going to come up now and he is going to share a few of the "becauseofJesus moments. Here are some of the stories. We were and are praying that this wouldn't be a one time thing but a movement, a New Year Revolution of God's love.

Thank you to all who were able to participate in the "becauseofJesus movement. 1 John 3:17 **If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?** When we turn a cold shoulder to someone in need we are covering up God's love. These are sins of omission – not doing the good we are to do. Any guilt because past

regrets? Me too. Any missed opportunities? Me too. Ever get so busy doing the urgent thing that you didn't have time to do the important thing? Me too. Maybe you are thinking I should have, I could have. Me too.

Friends listen carefully and take to heart the good news of God. 1 John 3:19,20 **This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰ If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.** He knows we are his, not because we are so good but because He is so so good. We are his not because of what we have done but because of what he has done. We are his not because we earned his love but because he loves us unconditionally. He knows we are his, #becauseofJesus! And so, each new day, each new second is second simply a new opportunity to be loved by God's unconditional love and to reflect that same love of God on others.

Thank you Lord for investing your life of love for each of us. Lord help us to grasp onto the comfort of your unconditional love. And God if anyone here is feeling more guilt than joy, redirect them to your unconditional love. Help us to invest our life and love in you and your people. Lord your love and life with you never ends. Your love brings a New Year Revolution. Amen.