

Victory of the Lamb – May 13, 2018 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Relationships: Some Assembly Required – First Things First

Big week coming up. Today is Mother's Day. And Mother's Day week this year includes the grand opening of IKEA this Wednesday in our own back yard. How cool is that!?! No more traveling through Illinois construction and toll plazas. The deal is, I know we will end up buying things at IKEA that will require some assembly. So like if we buy a book shelf, or a dresser, the product will come in this big heavy box that will take a couple of us to put in the cart, and then lift out of the cart and put into the van, and a couple of us to carry it into the house. We will lay that big box down on the floor and then open the box. And there will be this plastic bag in the box that will have all sorts and sizes of screws, bolts, fasteners, nuts, washers, and pegs. And directions/instructions complete with diagrams on how to assemble it. And the directions will begin with number 1. First things first. If it didn't come with instructions, I might very well try to do a step or two out of order which would lead to great frustration and maybe a slanted dresser, drawers that don't work right, even a complete and total product failure. So the instructions are numbered, first things first. In our relationships, first things need to come first.

This morning as we begin our new series: Relationship: Some Assembly Required, Matthew 22:37-38 Jesus replied: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.** Jesus calls this commandment to love God with our whole being, our whole personality, our whole emotion, our whole mind the greatest commandment.

In God's letter to us Jesus asked his disciple Peter and you and me, **“Do you love me?”** (John 21:16a) What gives Jesus the authority, the right, the permission and the desire to ask this. (Since we are conditional creatures, what has God done that we should love him?) First things first. As we turn to the beginnings of God's letter to us, we see that God made us in his own image, that he formed our first parents from the dust of the ground and that he breathed his breath into them giving them the breath of life. The book of Psalms says, that God knits us together in our mother's womb. So, if you look between your index finger and your thumb you will be able to see knit marks. Now think about it, when an engineer makes us something, she is likely the one who knows how it will best work. The engineer of car knows how it works best. She knows that a car is going to work a whole lot better driving on a road than trying to fly through space. God made us, and he knows what we were made to do and how life will be best for us.

Since God made us, he is obviously invested in us and he knows what is best for us. So God commands us to love him with the whole of our very self. God is not a megalomaniac. He is not secure, in fact he is quite self-sufficient. But God is jealous. He is jealous not of us but for us. Just as parents don't want anyone or anything hurting their kids even more so God doesn't want us to get hurt or get lead astray. And he knows that if we put our hope, our trust, our emotion, our dreams, into something less than him, we will get hurt, led astray, not have a full life, a joyful life, a life of meaning and purpose. He wants what is best for us and so he commands us to love him first and most.

How much time do you put into your relationships with a person? That depends right, on whether or not you really like that person or not. How much time do you put into your relationship with your work? That depends too, whether you like your job or not or whether you are a workaholic. How much time do you put into a sport? For example, right now, I probably run about 6 hours a week as I am still

recovering from a hamstring issue. Who or what do you love? Let me ask it another way, what does your calendar and your bank account say about who or what you love?

How much time do you put into your relationship with God? How much time do you spend with God in an average week. For those of you who haven't been going to church, you may not have even considered it a possibility that you could spend time with God? For those of us who have been going to church we know we ought to be spending time with him, reading his letter to us, but sometimes we don't, sometimes we do but we kinda space out during it, sometimes we lose focus, sometimes we get distracted as we get memorized by the twitter feeds and Instagram posts. Our relationship with God often lacks our heart, our soul and our mind. We have blown it. But God hasn't. We are imperfect in our love for God but God is perfect in all things including his love for you. We deserve punishment but God took it. Our love fell short God's love lasts an eternity.

The good news is that God's relationship with us isn't based on our behavior but on who God is. We don't earn a Savior. We need a Savior and God is that Savior. First things first: God is love. God loves us without regard to our merit or worthiness. In fact, the letter says, **God demonstrates his love to us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us.** Even though God is above all things he values us, he is focused on our needs, **And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.** Philippians 4:19, he freely gives from his resources to meet our needs without expecting or demanding anything in return. God gives first, and last and in the middle. Don't try to love God without first receiving his overflowing, unconditional, reckless, outrageous love for you. **We love because he first loved us.** 1 John 4:19. Love is impossible for us practice apart from God. It is foreign to our nature. God alone is the source of love.

If you ever doubt God's love, all you need to do is to go to the cross, his, not yours. Hebrews 12:2 **fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** For the joy set before Him... that's us! When Jesus was on the cross, the joy that kept Him going — the passion that fueled His endurance of pain — was knowing the freedom His death, burial, and resurrection would produce in our lives. Jesus wasn't forced to die. He wasn't overpowered, outnumbered, or tricked into it. He chose the Cross because He loves you with his whole being. Jesus' passionate love for us took Him to the Cross — with its pain, humiliation, and complete separation from God — and then on to the resurrected life that means victory over sin and death for you and me. What passion!

My family knows I am not exactly a fixer upper guy. In fact, I'm pretty sure when I was talking about the IKEA instructions, they were saying under their breath, even out loud that I can't even do that. All that being said, I want to share a tool with you, that I guarantee will help you. A magnifying glass – bet you didn't see that coming. Whatever you magnify you get more of. If we magnify, fix, focus our eyes on the works of God we will see God more clearly. Some of you came today broken, bitter and blaming but when you magnify God you get the taste of forgiveness for yourself and for others. Some of you came to day with hope but when you magnify God you receive hope not only for today but for all eternity. Some of you came today busy as all get out, things to do, not sure how you are going to get them all done but Jesus has interrupted your journey to show you what is eternal. I'm so glad you are here. Some of you came to worship today filled disappointment but today Jesus offers you an appointment with his love that doesn't disappoint.

The Danyang-Kunshan Grand Bridge, on the Beijing-Shanghai high speed railway in China, is the longest bridge in the world. It covers a total distance of 102.4 miles. Ten thousand contractors took four years to complete the construction of the Danyang-Kunshan, which was finished in 2010. The railway began operation in 2011. Around 30 AD Jesus of Nazareth constructed a bridge on his own that reaches from heaven to earth and connects us to God. It was assembled with a hammer, nails and unconditional love. It connects heaven with earth and God with sinners of God. Some of you know this bridge as the cross. Because you see God knew when it comes to relationship some assembly is required and first thing first. So he went first for you!