

"CALL 1-900-FOR-BABE"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
October 13, 1996

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INTRODUCTION

The minister was sitting quietly in his study going over some last minute notes for his Sunday sermon when his wife appeared in the doorway and said, "We have to talk! Now!" The young pastor, knowing that his wife was usually a very calm person, sensed that something very disturbing had happened and so he motioned to his wife to come in and close the door and sit down.

"We have a problem" she sighed and with that handed her husband a crumbled slip of paper.

"What's this?" he asked, taking the slip of paper in his hand. "Read it...just read it" she said. The minister read it aloud. "Call 1-900-FOR-BABE". He seemed puzzled. "That" said his wife, "was in our son's pocket!"

The minister looked at the slip of paper again and tried to figure it out. Why would their youngest son, now twelve years of age, have this telephone number in his pocket. Maybe someone at school gave it to him as a joke. Or, perhaps his older brother, age 16, had something to do with it. But, try as he might, the minister could not shake from his mind the thought that his younger son might have copied the number down for himself and horror of horrors, might have already used it. He and his wife would have to get to the bottom of this.

That evening, after supper, the minister and his wife called their youngest son into their family room and produced the note. "What's this all about?" said his mother after the son had had time to examine this bit of incriminating evidence.

"It's for Dad" he calmly replied. "For Dad?" replied his mother. "For your Father?" "What do you mean" she said glancing in the direction of her husband. "Well" replied the twelve year old...."you know how much dad loves to fish". "Yes...." said his mother, wondering where all of this was going.

"Well....I was watching this fishing program on TV last Saturday"...."you know, the one we always watch. At the end of the show there was this advertisement about getting information about all the hot fishing spots and then Babe Winkleman came on and said if you want the list just call 1-900-FOR-BABE....and I wrote it down for Dad."

THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM TO BE

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Let me say that again.

A colleague shared this one with me. He went out for a morning stroll in his neighborhood and while out, he came across a woman pushing a baby carriage up a

We learn to love because someone important in our life models love for us. There was a story in the Upper Room which so many of you read faithfully that touched me. Sandra Palmer Carr tells about rocking her four year old son, Boyd, in a high-backed wooden rocking chair. Boyd was facing his mother as they rocked....his legs folded at the knee. Suddenly he lifted his small head, stared straight at his mother and became very still. He then cupped her face in his little hands and said in a whisper,

"Mommy.....I'm in your eyes!"

He had seen his own reflection in his mother's eye and this strangely affected him. Mother and son stayed in that same position for several moments as the rocking stopped and the room became quiet.

"And I'm in yours" his mother said.

Then he leaned his head against her contentedly and she resumed rocking and singing. Occasionally, in the days that followed, little four year old Boyd would check to see if his discovery was lasting. "Am I still in your eyes, mommy?" he would ask as he reached up for her.

Boyd learned to love from his mother. Each of us learned to love the same way. From mom. From dad. From a grandparents, perhaps. Perhaps an aunt or an uncle, but each of us has a story to tell in this regard. Think of it this way that we saw ourselves in someone else's eyes. I like that....beautiful.

But where did such love originate? John's Epistle tells us that it originated with God - who is the source of love. As the Bible reminds us, "We love because God first loved us." Sandra Palmer Carr concludes her sharing with this thought:

"In life's uncertain moments...it is comforting
to know I am still in my Heavenly Father's eyes".

Love is something you learn. It is something you pick-up along the way. It is something you pass on to others....to children entrusted to our care.

LOVE IS SOMETHING YOU DO

Moving on, secondly, love is something you do. It is pro-active. We can talk about love until we are blue in the face, but if our actions aren't loving...our love is meaningless...sounding brass, a tinkling cymbal. As I've said before: doing beats talking every time. Let me repeat that, too.

Dennis and Barbara Rainey have written a book entitled, Moments Together For Couples. In it, they introduce the reader to a group of men known as The Men of the Titanic.

Apparently a pastor in Toledo, Ohio put together this group of men who resolved to demonstrate that they love their wives sacrificially. They named themselves after the men who sacrificed their lives so their wives and children could board the lifeboats as the ocean liner, Titanic, sank below the waves back there in 1912.

For six months these men planned the most incredible evening a woman could ever imagine. They first made handwritten invitations and then sent limousines to pick up their wives to a banquet hall decorated in nautical themes. A corsage was at each wife's place setting. The men had even taken training on how to serve

their wives the meal....an exact replica of the six-course meal that was served in the First-Class dining room on the Titanic on the night it went down. A ship's bell signaled the end of each course. Then the men stood up and announced that a letter had been found floating in the debris of the Titanic and that it was now being read for the very first time. One man stood up and read a wonderful love letter....words of praise and affection...from a man to his wife. And at the end of the letter, he revealed that he had actually written the letter for his own wife after which each man then presented his wife with her own love letter.

Later on the pastor said,

"There was something sacred about the entire evening. It was a celebration that our wives were gifts from God to us...."

I realize that by now I'm probably in trouble with every husband here in this room this morning. I suspect that few husbands present go to that kind of trouble to demonstrate their love for their wives. According to surveys that I have reviewed, most wives wish their husbands would simply say, "I love you.... more often". But saying we love is not enough either. Love is a concrete act. As John put it:

"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son..."

Let me bring this second point to a close by suggesting that ~~before this day ends,~~ you do two things:

"Tell a person you have not told recently that you love them. For a person you are always telling you love, do something that will validate your love."

First: love is something you learn. Second: love is also something you do.

LOVE IS THE WORLD'S ONLY HOPE

Finally, love is the world's only hope. If we don't help the world discover love...real love.. ~~then our world~~ will never break the cycle of despair and violence that engulfs it from decade to decade in barbarous wars.

I don't see any other hope for the world than that men and women and young people and children shall learn to love. That is why it is so important for the world to know about Christ - for He is love personified. He showed us love in action. He taught us that love is at the heart of authentic religion. People need to know that love is a concrete act - showing concern and compassion and forgiveness. That kind of love can save the world. It cuts across racial lines, gender lines, nationality lines and binds us together into a community of oneness. From time to time we need to renew that pilgrimage of love. You and I need to search our hearts and see if there is more that we might do to introduce people to the love of Christ, for truly....to know Jesus is to love. Sometimes things are not what they seem. If people were to look at your life would they understand that the two great commandments of our faith are to love God and to love our neighbor?

Let me close with an account of one of the most moving moments ever recorded in the arena of sports.

Perhaps some of you may remember the day and the game...not too long ago... when Pele played his last game over here at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey. After the game was over Pele spoke and it was quite an emotional scene. Let me read the account to you as it appeared in the NY Times.

"It was his day, and everyone was properly respectful. When the diplomats and celebrities were introduced, they waved to the crowd and remained silent in deference to his presence, even the unretiring Muhammad Ali stood mute.

When it came time for them to give him their gifts and praise, they did so as tersely as possible...and then they left the microphone to him, and the silence covered the stadium like a fog.

'Ladies and gentlemen' Pele said, putting his hands behind his head as if to support his quivering words. 'I am very happy to be here with you in this greatest moment of my life. I want to thank you all, every single one of you. I want to take this opportunity to ask you to pay attention to the young of the world, the children, the kids. We need them so much. And I want to ask you because I think that...I believe...that love, love is the....the...the....'

Tears welled in his eyes and he could no longer stem their flow. He tightened his grip on himself and continued, his words shaking, his voice cracking. 'Love is more important than what we can take in life. Everything pass. Please say with me three times - love, love, love'.

As the message board flashed the word, Pele heard the crowd echo his message. Three times. Love. Love. Love. And it was all too much for him. He could say but one thing more before his voice was lost in his tears. He said, 'Thank you very much.'

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness and to Your presence in these moments that come at the end of another service of worship. Confirm within us the feelings and decisions and intentions of these moments. Help us to be aware that things are not always what they seem to be and that love is something we learn, something we do and our living depends on our loving...and what we love really tells the story of who we are. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen.

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A colleague shared this one with me. He went out for a morning stroll in the neighbor and while out, he came across a woman pushing a baby carriage up a

hill. He noted that she was struggling with it and offered to lend a hand. It was, he said, a rather unwieldy baby carriage and it was no easy job to get it to the top, but they made it and as he prepared to leave, the woman thanked him for his help. He responded with a kind word...

"Do you mind if I take a little peek at the precious baby that I've helped up this hill?" The woman laughed and said "Why mercy me.....pastor....this ain't a baby we've been struggling with....it's my husband's weekly six-pack of beer."

No. Things are not always what they seem to be.

I wonder....as people look at our lives...your life and my life...I wonder if they know that there are two laws by which Christians are to conform: to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. That's it. That's the bottom line. If you're a serious Christian that should be reflected. If you're a follower of Christ, people should see that. Love God. Love of neighbor.

Over there in the 22nd chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we read about a lawyer coming up to Jesus and asking Him, "Teacher...which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" I've always felt it was a natural question to ask Him since there were so many, many laws on the books that had to be followed, more "Do Nots" than "Do's". Jesus answered,

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This (He said) is the greatest and the foremost commandment and the second (He said) is like unto it....You shall love your neighbor as yourself. And on these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

I wonder....if that what our neighbors and friends see when they look at us. Love for God. Love for our neighbor.

But some may ask: what is love? We've talked about "love your neighbor" for years in this country without always applying it. I have many African-American friends who will tell me that's still the case....we're still not applying it the way Jesus would have us. What is love? So often we say, "I love you" when what we really mean is "I need you" and when I no longer need you, I will be through with you. What is love? We hear people say, "Hey, friend....do I ever love my new car!" Is that love?

If you were to list the qualities that make up love, where would you begin? Let me share some thoughts or some things I would put on my list and see if your list in any way matches up with mine.

IT'S SOMETHING WE LEARN

First-off, love is something one learns. We are not born "loving". To be sure, babies are loveable, but they are not necessarily loving. We come into this world "grasping" and our chief concern is our own needs. We cry and someone meets our needs and we are contented. Some people, unfortunately, never seem to get beyond that kind of approach to life. But most of us do learn along the way to share...to quit grasping and to start giving. We learn to return love as well as to receive it.

We learn to love because someone important in our life models love for us. There was a story in the Upper Room which so many of you read faithfully that touched me. Sandra Palmer Carr tells about rocking her four year old son, Boyd, in a high-backed wooden rocking chair. Boyd was facing his mother as they rocked....his legs folded at the knee. Suddenly he lifted his small head, stared straight at his mother and became very still. He then cupped her face in his little hands and said in a whisper,

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