

"PERFECT LOVE PUSHES OUT FEAR"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
April 30, 1995

"PERFECT LOVES PUSHES OUT FEAR"

INTRODUCTION

Today's sermon grows out of two or three lines found in the fourth chapter of First John. Let me read them to you.

John says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect loves casts out fear". And in the verse that follows, "We love because He first loved us....and if any one says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar...."

DEVELOPMENT

Let me try to work into this text with you by sharing a delightful article that was in the Reader's Digest for April a couple of years ago. It caught my attention then and I've carried it around with me for a while and with the opening of the new baseball season....if I'm ever going to work it in, it's now or never....and I'll let you guess where I got my sunburn.

The article was entitled, "The Perfect Day" and it was referring to the 8th day of October in the year 1956. Raise a hand if you have any idea what happened that day. It was the day that Don Larsen pitched a perfect game for the New York Yankees against their old enemies, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Many of us can remember just where we were and what we were doing that delightful October afternoon. It happened to coincide for me with an interview that I had that week to come and be pastor of this church. For me, it was a sign...

The interesting slant on this story is that it was written by Philip Hoose, Don Larsen's second cousin, nine years old and in the fourth grade at that time.

Earlier that Summer, in July of 1956, Philip Hoose had been taken by his father to Chicago to see the Yankees play the White Sox and hopefully to meet his cousin, Don Larsen. Unfortunately, the game was rained out, but what looked like a tragedy and caused young Phil to cry in disappointment later turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Phil's dad was able to arrange a meeting with Don Larsen at the hotel where the Yankees were staying. Phil's dad shook hands with his cousin in the hotel lobby and young Phil put out his hand to do the same. But big Don Larsen wrapped his arms around little Phil and gave him a great hug ...a big hug...instead. Then he proceed to introduce nine year old, Phil, to Whitey Ford and then to Casey Stengel and he even got Mickey Mantle to autograph a ball. Sitting at the table and enjoying lunch, Yogi Berra walked by and affectionately rubbed his head. It was truly a wonderful and memorable day for little Phil Hoose!

BUT THERE'S MORE

But there's more....home again and back in school, Phil begged his mother to let him stay home from school on October the 8th and watch his second cousin pitch in the Fifth Game of the World Series. Like all good mothers, she refused. School was more important. A little after three that afternoon, Mr. Northcott, the school principle, came into the fourth grade class room and asked the teacher if he could say a few words to the class. He said to the children who had no idea of why he was there....

"Something very special has happened. The Yankees won the World Series game today and Phil's cousin has just pitched the first perfect game in the history of the World Series"

Then Mr. Northcott asked if anyone knew what a perfect game was. Someone in the class said,

"It's a no-hitter." "No...it's even better" said Mr. Northcott. "Don Larsen didn't give up a hit...he didn't walk anyone, and the Yankees didn't make any errors. No Dodger even got to first base. Congratulations, Phil.!"

Philip Hoose, now 44, recalls how the momentous events of that day, along with the events of that July afternoon in Chicago when he met some of the Yankee players...he remembers how his classmates applauded and gathered round his desk to shake his hand and pound his back (No 'high-fives' back in those days)...he remembers how all of this gave him a confidence that said that he, too, could rise above adversity...meet any challenge and accomplish something extraordinary in life. What a difference it was to make in his life...

Phil didn't pitch that perfect game, but he was intimately related to the one who did. He was not only a relative of the one who pitched that perfect game, but he had even been "hugged" by the man who pitched that perfect game, and he had been "treated" in a very special way by the man who had pitched that perfect game!

LOVE AT THE CENTER

Now, back to our text and hopefully you'll see where this is going. Please stay with me...

A Christian psychologist by the name of Everett Shostrom, in his book, Healing Love, proposes that a central core exists in every person of either fear or of love...or of various mixtures of both. He writes that if fear is the dominant reality, the dominant note, the person will be stuck "at best" unable to grow...unable to change. But if love is the dominant reality, the dominant note, the person will, "at worst"...be growing slowly....struggling against significant but not controlling fear.

Love at the center of our lives is as vital to our spirits as oxygen is to our bodies. That's the point he is making....

The central theme of this theory is certainly consistent with our Christian faith and our experience and it's summed up beautifully for us here in First John, chapter four and in verses 18 and 19.

"There is no fear in love...but perfect love casts our fear....and we love because He first loved us."

Follow along carefully and listen. We are all capable, potentially, if not actually, of "loving" and "of being loved". But unlike some theories that are constructed on only human experience, Everett Shostrom's theory is "in sync", in harmony with the Gospel...that man cannot love perfectly, but needs to experience perfect love in order to conquer sin and selfishness, defined as fear and distrust.

We love our parents, but not...perfectly. Our parents love us, but not... perfectly. We love our children, but not perfectly. Our children love us, but not perfectly. Human beings do not do anything perfectly.

The Gospel allows us our imperfections by declaring that perfect love comes from God and the only way we can receive it is to "accept it" as a gift. We can't earn God's perfect love. And we don't even deserve God's perfect love. We can only receive it humbly. And as Christians we believe that this perfect love is offered to us by God through the death of Christ on the cross and by His resurrection...thus, those heavy doctrines of atonement and redemption.

And this is what preachers are referring to when we talk about receiving Christ....when we talk about accepting and believing in Christ. It is a trusting love that is beyond us....trusting that love to save us...to redeem us...to grow in us....to guide us and to make us "new persons" - those persons that God has intended us to be. It involves our choosing God, and yet in retrospect, it seems as if God, in His amazing grace and mercy, has already chosen us. This perfect love, when received, takes time and takes our faith commitment to work itself in and around and through our lives...conquering fear and insecurity and whatever else lurks there in the shadowy corners of our lives. As John reminds us in that second line, "We love because He first loved us".

Perfect love casts out, or slowly pushes out fear and shame and distrust. His love which is received and nurtured and kept alive and growing through our study and prayer and worship and service....all help to give us confidence to live on the upper levels and to keep on "hoping"...and growing...and living.

A POPULAR IMAGE, WITH THE EMPHASIS ON WHAT WE DO

A popular image of how spiritual conversion and

growth happens is found in the following:

"I decide to quit some sinful, some destructive behavior. For example....impatience or over-indulgence of some kind...or perhaps stinginess....and I try to rid my life of this problem. If I try hard enough, I succeed and God smiles. If I don't try hard enough, I fail. God frowns and I try again sometime in the future...."

Now with such an image of spiritual conversion or growth, it's no wonder so many of us fail so often in getting rid of some unwanted habits or behavior patterns in our lives. That scenario, you see, is putting the emphasis on what we do. The Gospel message puts the emphasis on what God does - what He did in Christ and what He does in our lives through the Holy Spirit. Our best effort is simply to respond to what God does. We are not strong enough and knowledgeable enough or willing enough to rid our lives of fear and distrust - yes, of sin. We cannot push fear and distrust out of our lives, but remember this: God can!

We believe in the power of God to do just that and we cooperate with that power through prayer and through study and through service...through being active participants in God's family, the Church.

A prayer for newlyweds that came into my hands recently said that,

"We should not expect perfection from one another, perfection belongs only to God."

He comes into our lives by invitation only and begins to push out of our lives -

slowly and painfully - those elements...thoughts, feelings, behavior patterns... that are in conflict with His will and with our human fulfillment. To me, it's highly significant as to whether we see it as our job or God's to rid ourselves of those destructive elements in our lives. It is all we can do to work with God in the great task of redemption. I think we will fail in that task if we see it only or primarily as our job. Only the perfect love and the power of God is capable of saving us and fitting us for service above.

Said John, "Perfect love casts out fear". "We love BECAUSE....."

CLOSING In the church courtyard of a little Methodist Church in a town in Maine there stood two pin oaks. They were the despair of the church custodian for they refused to shed their lives in the Fall. They kept them all winter. And even on the coldest and the windiest days the church custodian would watch these dried and withered leaves cling to the trees. But one Spring the custodian remarked,

"But they're falling now...not because of wind and bluster but because of a force much more powerful, one which they cannot resist. New life has come to the trees with the returning Spring, and the old leaves have got to go."

And such is the manner, you see, in which "perfect love pushes out fear". The church custodian offered this concluding insight....

"Bad habits....bad companions...dry and withered ways of life...all yield when into the Christian comes new life in the power of the Spirit".

His words and his insight seemed to play on my mind this past week as we witnessed the trees and the flowers and the parks come alive again.

Phil Hoose will never forget the day his cousin hugged him and introduced him to the other Yankee legends. He will never forget the day his cousin became a legend in baseball by pitching a perfect game. Phil received a large dose of confidence and self-esteem on those days because of his cousin's kindness and special accomplishment. Now listen carefully to these closing words...

Friends, on a much grander and much deeper scale, we benefit from the special accomplishment and kindness of God - in Christ - the moment we receive His love like a big hug.....though He knows well our innate weaknesses, our selfish and sinful ways. That intimate relationship - initiated by God - gives us the confidence to overcome fear and distrust and all other things associated with life's downside. God's perfect love casts out fear. Our arrogance can cast out God. The choice is ours. Think of it this way: are you pushing God out of your life....resisting God's knock on your heart's door? Or, are you allowing God to slowly push fear and distrust out of your life...from those things that may be keeping you from real peace, real joy and real fulfillment? Think on it... and pray about it with me in these moments...

PRAYER

For Your saving love that can help and heal, that can lift us and put us on the "high road" of life, we thank You, O God. We would affirm that love here this morning....and shift the burdens we carry from our weak shoulders to Your strong ones.

Make us all that we can be for we invite You into our lives....to redeem us, through Christ, our Lord, who has won the battle for us all. In His victory and in His Easter triumph, as people of the Easter faith, we now pray. Amen.

ANTHEM: "Go Not Far From Me, O God"

"Go not far from me, O God. Cast me not away in the time of age. Forsake me not when my strength faileth. O let my mouth be filled with Thy praise, that I may sing Thy glory and honor all the day long."

ANTHEM: "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth"

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another. I know that my Redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."

ORGAN POSTLUDE

The organ postlude - a final offering of our praise to God - is played after the Benediction. Time permitting, we invite you to share in the beauty of it.

FOR THOSE WHO SING

New members are always welcome to audition to sing in the Choir. Rehearsals are held Sunday morning at 9:30.

THURSDAY, MAY 11

The Oratorio Society of the City of New York will present a special concert on May 11th at eight o'clock in Carnegie Hall commemorating "Fifty Years of Peace in Europe and the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations". Lyndon Woodside will be conducting music by Brahms and Vaughan Williams.

BAKE SALE III

The third of three Bake Sales for the benefit of our All Church Picnic of June 17th will be held today in the Russell Room as a part of the coffee hour.

TONIGHT AT 6:30

If membership in this church is of interest to you, try to attend this evening's "Conversations in Membership", at 6:30 in the downstairs Russell Room. New members will be received on May 21st. Be in touch with Mr. Clarke or Mr. Bonwitt if you feel a tug in this direction.

"HOUNDS OF HEAVEN"

The "Hounds of Heaven" meet on Tuesday evening at 6:30 in Fellowship Hall. Maxie Dunnam's, The Workbook on Loving The Jesus Way, is being discussed. New friends as well as old ones are always most welcome.

WEDNESDAY EVENINGS

Join Bill Bonwitt, our Assistant Minister, around 6:30 pm in the sanctuary for a quiet time of prayer and thoughtful reflection every Wednesday evening from now to the end of May.

SPRING RUMMAGE SALE

The date is Saturday, May 20th, and workers are needed for it, not only the day of the sale but also several evenings of the preceding week. Be in touch with Dianne Keller if you can lend a hand. Her number is 876-2037 (evenings).

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

April 30, 1995

ORDER OF WORSHIP

11 A. M.

ORGAN "Elevazione" Zipoli
CALL TO WORSHIP
HYMN NO. 315 "Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain"
PRAYER OF CONFESSION (seated)
We confess before You, now, O God, our poor
stewardship of life. We have squandered time,
under-used our opportunities, misdirected our
loyalties, resisted growth and grievously wasted
the gifts of life. In secret we have worshipped
the works of our minds and hands. The applause
of the world has mattered more to us than fidelity
to You. Make us duly penitent for these and all
our sins. And let the mercy of Christ inspire us
to humble, purer ways in this time of worship.
In the spirit of the Risen Christ, we offer You
this our prayer of confession. Amen.
SILENT MEDITATION - WORDS OF ASSURANCE - LORD'S PRAYER

PSALTER Psalm 148 No. 861
AFFIRMATION OF FAITH No. 888
GLORIA PATRI No. 71

ANTHEM "Go Not Far From Me, O God" Zingarelli
SCRIPTURE I John 4: 13 - 16, 18 - 21 Page 1067
PASTORAL PRAYER
PARISH CONCERNS
ANTHEM "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" Peeters
PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY
HYMN NO. 311 "Now the Green Blade Riseth"
SERMON "Perfect Love Pushes Out Fear" Mr. Clarke
HYMN NO. 304 "Easter People, Raise Your Voices"
BENEDICTION
ORGAN "Now Praise The Lord" Karg-Elert

***Interval for Ushering

LAY READER

We welcome Suzanne DeBow to the lectern today. A native of Greenville, South Carolina, a graduate of Auburn University with a BA in Journalism, Suzanne is Managing Editor of Miller Freeman Travel Groups In-House Advertising Agency. Here in the Church she teaches Sunday School and is a member of the Education Committee.

GREETERS AND USHERS

The greeters for today are Lynn Clarke and Jean Laupus. The ushers are George Crawford, Christine Day, Effie French, Larry Morales and Tara Timmerman.

AN INVITATION

Coffee and tea will be served in the Russell Room following the service. All are invited to share in these moments of warmth made possible for us today by Grace and Al Thomas, Anne Gary, JoBeth Moad, Kristen and Mark Raker and Tara Timmerman.

CHURCH SCHOOL AND NURSERY CARE

Sessions of Church School for children are offered Sunday mornings from ten-thirty to twelve. Nursery care for infants and toddlers is available on the fourth floor.

ADULT BIBLE CLASS

The Adult Bible Class meets on Sunday mornings at 9:30 in Fellowship Hall. The class is studying the Gospel of Matthew. Bill Bonwitt is class leader.

MAY 21 ART CONNECTION

Sunday, May 21st, is the date of this year's ART Connection. Be in touch with Jean Laupus if you'd like to be a part of it and sign up downstairs for your contribution to the Art Connection Buffett.

"And all things...whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing...you shall receive. And as many as touched : Him were made whole!"

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart. For we dwell in the shelter of the Almighty. He is our refuge and our strength."

"We know that in everything, God works together for good with those who love Him!"

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint".

"God so love the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases".

"Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in thee".

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I share with you the Good News: We are forgiven".

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

O Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers...for others, as well as for ourselves. Touch with healing, O God...Father of us all, those whom we mention in our prayers this hour:

1. Coralie Bailey 2. Eric DeFreitas 3. Mary Lou Risley / Velma Kirsh

Bobbie Heron 4. Daisy Herrick 5. Ann Cavallaro 6. Geraldine 7. Blasingame, friend of Walter.

...beloved members and friends of this congregation. Comfort the bereaved and the broken hearted among us...and especially be close to Cathy who in recent days has lost a loved one. Abide among us as a healing benediction. Heal each of us at the point of our deepest need. Cathy Gradner, death of her father...recent death..

Answer the outspoken prayers now offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, spoken in the name and spirit of Jesus, who taught us to say when we pray.... For we ask all of this in the powerful name and lifting spirit of Jesus who taught us to say when we pray...

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the glory, forever. Amen"

MICHAEL, Bro. of AL THOMAS —
DOUGLAS BRAID, COUSIN of MURIEL WEST —

FIRST INTRODUCTION

The week of toil has ended. Our day of rest is at hand. May the rest and the quiet of this hour of worship refresh our inner life. And may it renew in all of us a sense of God's holy and abiding Presence.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

SECOND INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation....a time in which we prepare ourselves expectantly...that the Spirit of the living God may be made real to us in this hour of worship.

In quietness, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

THIRD INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter into a time of silent meditation as we come into the Presence of Him whom our faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

FOURTH INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation. In these moments, let us ponder the pattern our lives have been weaving as we come into the Presence of Him whom our Faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION

We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light".

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek and you will find.

.... Knock, and it will be open unto you."

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me. If you love Me, you will keep my commandments"

"For I tell you...do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat...or drink..nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food? And the body more than raiment."

"But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present...to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature - shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord."

PASTORAL PRAYER: April 30, 1995

HEAR OUR THOUGHTS, O GOD, as we come together once again in this hour of prayer and this place of worship for all people....

MAKE US SENSITIVE to your spirit. Make us conscious of your nearness, of your healing power and lifting presence.

WITH GRATEFUL AND JOYOUS HEARTS we come into your presence. For the warm and delicate beauty of a Spring day, we are thankful. It serves to remind us that this is Your world and that every good and perfect gift comes from You.

AS the sun warms the earth on this April day, so, too, may Your spirit of love be warming our hearts.

AS WE WITNESS the miracle of growth and new life taking place in the world of nature, we pray that we may also be showing signs of growth and new life in our inner life.

Growing in our faith, our trust in You and in each other.

Growing in our understanding of Your word for us and for our world.

Growing in our commitment to Jesus Christ and to all He represents in our life together.

Growing in overcoming those deadly sins of the disposition - anger, greed, lust, prejudice, pride, selfishness.

LOOK DOWN on us as we worship You this hour.

Help us to look deep into our hearts and to root out those things that dishonor You and prevent us from living at our best.

OUR PRAYERS THIS DAY reach out to include those carrying heavy responsibilities of leadership in our land.

MAY THE INFLUENCE of this Lord's Day be strong in our city. May all who worship You this day and call upon Your name be given:

Strong hearts to bear their burdens;
Willing hearts to bear the burdens of others,
Believing hearts to cast all of their burdens upon You.

Give to each of us the give of Faith. In the name and spirit of the Risen Christ, we pray.

PARISH CONCERNS

APRIL 30, 1995

WELCOME

WELCOME TO PARK AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SOME OF YOU MAY NOT HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

WE WANT TO GIVE YOU A SPECIAL WELCOME THIS BEAUTIFUL MORNING

IT WILL BE HELPFUL TO US IF YOU WOULD FILL OUT A VISITORS CARD - FOUND IN THE PEW - DROP IT IN THE COLLECTION PLATE

WEAR THE NAME TAG WHEN YOU JOIN US FOR REFRESHMENTS AFTER CHURCH - DOWNSTAIRS IN THE RUSSELL ROOM - WHERE TODAY WE HAVE A SPECIAL TREAT FOR YOU AT OUR BAKE SALE TABLE

JUST AS VISITORS ARE INVITED TO WEAR NAME TAGS I HOPE ALL THE MEMBERS WILL DO THE SAME

NEWCOMERS WILL HAVE TO BE THE JUDGES BUT WE THINK WE ARE A FRIENDLY CHURCH - GET TO KNOW SOMEONE NEW TODAY

REACH OUT AND SAY WELCOME

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF WAYS TO FIND OUT ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON AT PARK AVENUE

ANNOUNCEMENTS IN THE BULLETIN

OUR MONTHLY NEWSLETTER A WORD IN EDGEWAYS IS AVAILABLE TO YOUR LEFT AS YOU LEAVE CHURCH OR DOWNSTAIRS NEAR THE COFFEE TABLE

PLEASE SPEAK TO REV CLARKE OR MYSELF OR ANY OF THE
FOLKS WHO HAVE BLUE NAME TAGS

WE'LL BE GLAD TO TELL YOU ABOUT OUR LIFE AND SERVICE AS
GOD'S CHILDREN GATHERED IN THIS PLACE

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO MIGHT WISH TO EXPLORE MAKING
YOUR TIE TO THIS CHURCH A BIT DEEPER BY CONSIDERING
MEMBERSHIP WE WILL HAVE A CONVERSATION IN MEMBERSHIP THIS
EVENING AT 6:30

BRIEF AND INFORMAL PRESENTATIONS

A WONDERFUL SLIDE SHOW WHICH HIGHLIGHTS THE
ACTIVITIES OF PARK AVENUE

AND A CHANCE TO MEET SOME OF THE MEMBERS

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS WE HAVE A BRIEF AND INFORMAL
SERVICE OF EVENING PRAYER AND MEDITATION - A FAITHFUL
GROUP HAS BEEN COMING EACH WEEK

WE WOULD LOVE TO HAVE YOU JOIN US

WEDNESDAY NIGHT 6:30 HERE IN THE SANCTUARY

HYMN SING NEXT SUNDAY 9 10:30

HIGHLIGHTS FOR MAY

ON THE 11TH THE ORATORIO SOCIETY, UNDER THE DIRECTION
OF OUR OWN LYNDON WOODSIDE WILL BE GIVING A CONCERT AT
CARNEGIE HALL

THEN ON ~~THE WEEKEND~~ OF THE 20 AND 21ST WE WILL HAVE
ANOTHER SPECIAL WEEKEND

SATURDAY WILL BE OUR SPRING RUMMAGE SALE


IT SAYS IN THE WORD IN EDGEWAYS THAT IT WILL THE
BARGAIN SALE TO END ALL BARGAIN SALES

ACTUALLY I HOPE NOT - BECAUSE ITS FUN TO JOIN WITH OTHERS SORTING RUMMAGE ON SATURDAYS AND EVENINGS BEFORE HAND AND THEN SHARING IN HELPING PEOPLE FIND BARGAINS AND RAISING MONEY FOR KIDS TO GO TO CAMP

A RUMMAGE SALE AT PARK AVENUE IS AN EXPERIENCE THAT EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST ONCE

SO IF THIS IS GOING TO BE THE ONE TO END ALL BARGAIN SALES YOU NEED TO TAKE PART IN IT - YOU MAY NEVER GET ANOTHER CHANCE

DIANE KELLER CAN ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS IF YOU WANT TO DONATE SOME RUMMAGE —


BELIEVE IT OR NOT — WE NEED SOME

THERE IS A BOX TO YOUR LEFT NEAR THE ELEVATOR YOU CAN BRING THINGS DURING THE WEEK

THEN SUNDAY THE 21ST

A VERY SPECIAL DAY

MY CLEVERNESS IS BEING TESTED BY THE NEWSLETTER

IT WAS NOT MY IDEA TO CALL THAT DAY A THREE RING CIRCUS

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU HAVE TO READ THE NEWSLETTER!

GOD LOVES A CAREFUL GIVER

START DEDIMINATIONS

50 20 1

50 - BEST RESTAURANTS

20 - UPSCALE DINERS NOT IN THE AREA BUT MOVING

1 - BETTER THAN BOTH

BEEN IN CHURCH, IN CHURCH, IN CHURCH

BE A CAREFUL GIVER

LET 50s + 20s HAVE A CHANCE TO BE IN CHURCH

AND REMEMBER

JESUS SAID - MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN RECEIVE

"PERFECT LOVE PUSHES OUT FEAR"

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INTRODUCTION

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John says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect loves casts out fear". And in the verse that follows, "We love because He first loved us....and if any one says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar...."

DEVELOPMENT

Let me try to work into this text with you by sharing a delightful article that was in the Reader's Digest for April a couple of years ago. It caught my attention then and I've carried it around with me for a while and with the opening of the new baseball season....if I'm ever going to work it in, it's now or never....and I'll let you guess where I got my sunburn.

The article was entitled, "The Perfect Day" and it was referring to the 8th day of October in the year 1956. Raise a hand if you have any idea what happened that day. It was the day that Don Larsen pitched a perfect game for the New York Yankees against their old enemies, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Many of us can remember just where we were and what we were doing that delightful October afternoon. It happened to coincide for me with an interview that I had that week to come and be pastor of this church. For me, it was a sign...

The interesting slant on this story is that it was written by Philip Hoose, Don Larsen's second cousin, nine years old and in the fourth grade at that time.

Earlier that Summer, in July of 1956, Philip Hoose had been taken by his father to Chicago to see the Yankees play the White Sox and hopefully to meet his cousin, Don Larsen. Unfortunately, the game was rained out, but what looked like a tragedy and caused young Phil to cry in disappointment later turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Phil's dad was able to arrange a meeting with Don Larsen at the hotel where the Yankees were staying. Phil's dad shook hands with his cousin in the hotel lobby and young Phil put out his hand to do the same. But big Don Larsen wrapped his arms around little Phil and gave him a great hug ...a big hug...instead. Then he proceeded to introduce nine year old, Phil, to Whitey Ford and then to Casey Stengel and he even got Mickey Mantle to autograph a ball. Sitting at the table and enjoying lunch, Yogi Berra walked by and affectionately rubbed his head. It was truly a wonderful and memorable day for little Phil Hoose!

BUT THERE'S MORE

But there's more....home again and back in school, Phil begged his mother to let him stay home from school on October the 8th and watch his second cousin pitch in the Fifth Game of the World Series. Like all good mothers, she refused. School was more important. A little after three that afternoon, Mr. Northcott, the school principle, came into the fourth grade class room and asked the teacher if he could say a few words to the class. He said to the children who had no idea of why he was there....

"Something very special has happened. The Yankees won the World Series game today and Phil's cousin has just pitched the first perfect game in the history of the World Series"

Then Mr. Northcott asked if anyone knew what a perfect game was. Someone in the class said,

"It's a no-hitter." "No...it's even better" said Mr. Northcott. "Don Larsen didn't give up a hit...he didn't walk anyone, and the Yankees didn't make any errors. No Dodger even got to first base. Congratulations, Phil.!"

Philip Hoose, now 44, recalls how the momentous events of that day, along with the events of that July afternoon in Chicago when he met some of the Yankee players....he remembers how his classmates applauded and gathered round his desk to shake his hand and pound his back (No 'high-fives' back in those days)....he remembers how all of this gave him a confidence that said that he, too, could rise above adversity...meet any challenge and accomplish something extraordinary in life. What a difference it was to make in his life...

Phil didn't pitch that perfect game, but he was intimately related to the one who did. He was not only a relative of the one who pitched that perfect game, but he had even been "hugged" by the man who pitched that perfect game, and he had been "treated" in a very special way by the man who had pitched that perfect game!

LOVE AT THE CENTER

Now, back to our text and hopefully you'll see where this is going. Please stay with me...

A Christian psychologist by the name of Everett Shostrom, in his book, Healing Love, proposes that a central core exists in every person of either fear or of love...or of various mixtures of both. He writes that if fear is the dominant reality, the dominant note, the person will be stuck "at best" unable to grow...unable to change. But if love is the dominant reality, the dominant note, the person will, "at worst"...be growing slowly....struggling against significant but not controlling fear.

Love at the center of our lives is as vital to our spirits as oxygen is to our bodies. That's the point he is making....

The central theme of this theory is certainly consistent with our Christian faith and our experience and it's summed up beautifully for us here in First John, chapter four and in verses 18 and 19.

"There is no fear in love...but perfect love casts our fear....and we love because He first loved us."

Follow along carefully and listen. We are all capable, potentially, if not actually, of "loving" and "of being loved". But unlike some theories that are constructed on only human experience, Everett Shostrom's theory is "in sync", in harmony with the Gospel....that man cannot love perfectly, but needs to experience perfect love in order to conquer sin and selfishness, defined as fear and distrust.

We love our parents, but not...perfectly. Our parents love us, but not... perfectly. We love our children, but not perfectly. Our children love us, but not perfectly. Human beings do not do anything perfectly.

The Gospel allows us our imperfections by declaring that perfect love comes from God and the only way we can receive it is to "accept it" as a gift. We can't earn God's perfect love. And we don't even deserve God's perfect love. We can only receive it humbly. And as Christians we believe that this perfect love is offered to us by God through the death of Christ on the cross and by His resurrection...thus, those heavy doctrines of atonement and redemption.

And this is what preachers are referring to when we talk about receiving Christ...when we talk about accepting and believing in Christ. It is a trusting love that is beyond us....trusting that love to save us...to redeem us...to grow in us...to guide us and to make us "new persons" - those persons that God has intended us to be. It involves our choosing God, and yet in retrospect, it seems as if God, in His amazing grace and mercy, has already chosen us. This perfect love, when received, takes time and takes our faith commitment to work itself in and around and through our lives...conquering fear and insecurity and whatever else lurks there in the shadowy corners of our lives. As John reminds us in that second line, "We love because He first loved us".

Perfect love casts out, or slowly pushes out fear and shame and distrust. His love which is received and nurtured and kept alive and growing through our study and prayer and worship and service....all help to give us confidence to live on the upper levels and to keep on "hoping"...and growing...and living.

A POPULAR IMAGE, WITH THE EMPHASIS ON WHAT WE DO

A popular image of how spiritual conversion and

growth happens is found in the following:

"I decide to quit some sinful, some destructive behavior. For example....impatience or over-indulgence of some kind...or perhaps stinginess....and I try to rid my life of this problem. If I try hard enough, I succeed and God smiles. If I don't try hard enough, I fail. God frowns and I try again sometime in the future....."

Now with such an image of spiritual conversion or growth, it's no wonder so many of us fail so often in getting rid of some unwanted habits or behavior patterns in our lives. That scenario, you see, is putting the emphasis on what we do. The Gospel message puts the emphasis on what God does - what He did in Christ and what He does in our lives through the Holy Spirit. Our best effort is simply to respond to what God does. We are not strong enough and knowledgeable enough or willing enough to rid our lives of fear and distrust - yes, of sin. We cannot push fear and distrust out of our lives, but remember this: God can!

We believe in the power of God to do just that and we cooperate with that power through prayer and through study and through service...through being active participants in God's family, the Church.

A prayer for newlyweds that came into my hands recently said that,

"We should not expect perfection from one another, perfection belongs only to God."

He comes into our lives by invitation only and begins to push out of our lives -

slowly and painfully - those elements...thoughts, feelings, behavior patterns... that are in conflict with His will and with our human fulfillment. To me, it's highly significant as to whether we see it as our job or God's to rid ourselves of those destructive elements in our lives. It is all we can do to work with God in the great task of redemption. I think we will fail in that task if we see it only or primarily as our job. Only the perfect love and the power of God is capable of saving us and fitting us for service above.

Said John, "Perfect love casts out fear". "We love BECAUSE....."

CLOSING

In the church courtyard of a little Methodist Church in a town in Maine there stood two pin oaks. They were the despair of the church custodian for they refused to shed their lives in the Fall. They kept them all winter. And even on the coldest and the windiest days the church custodian would watch these dried and withered leaves cling to the trees. But one Spring the custodian remarked,

"But they're falling now...not because of wind and bluster but because of a force much more powerful, one which they cannot resist. New life has come to the trees with the returning Spring, and the old leaves have got to go."

And such is the manner, you see, in which "perfect love pushes out fear". The church custodian offered this concluding insight....

"Bad habits....bad companions...dry and withered ways of life...all yield when into the Christian comes new life in the power of the Spirit".

His words and his insight seemed to play on my mind this past week as we witnessed the trees and the flowers and the parks come alive again.

Phil Hoose will never forget the day his cousin hugged him and introduced him to the other Yankee legends. He will never forget the day his cousin became a legend in baseball by pitching a perfect game. Phil received a large dose of confidence and self-esteem on those days because of his cousin's kindness and special accomplishment. Now listen carefully to these closing words...

Friends, on a much grander and much deeper scale, we benefit from the special accomplishment and kindness of God - in Christ - the moment we receive His love like a big hug.....though He knows well our innate weaknesses, our selfish and sinful ways. That intimate relationship - initiated by God - gives us the confidence to overcome fear and distrust and all other things associated with life's downside. God's perfect love casts out fear. Our arrogance can cast out God. The choice is ours. Think of it this way: are you pushing God out of your life....resisting God's knock on your heart's door? Or, are you allowing God to slowly push fear and distrust out of your life...from those things that may be keeping you from real peace, real joy and real fulfillment? Think on it... and pray about it with me in these moments...

PRAYER

For Your saving love that can help and heal, that can lift us and put us on the "high road" of life, we thank You, O God. We would affirm that love here this morning....and shift the burdens we carry from our weak shoulders to Your strong ones.

Make us all that we can be for we invite You into our lives....to redeem us, through Christ, our Lord, who has won the battle for us all. In His victory and in His Easter triumph, as people of the Easter faith, we now pray. Amen.