

Sermon Title - The Greatest Gift

Scripture – 1 Corinthians 13

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This week's message begins with a note from my Max Lucado devotional *Grace For The Moment* from November 8. The devotional is titled *Finishing Strong*. It begins with the following scripture:

Hebrews 12:3 – Think about Jesus' example. He held on while wicked people were doing evil things to Him. So do not get tired and stop trying.

Max then shares the following message – *Heaven was not foreign to Jesus. He is the only person to live on earth after He had lived in heaven. As believers, you and I will live in heaven after time on earth, but Jesus did just the opposite. He knew heaven before He came to earth. He knew what awaited Him upon His return. And knowing what awaited Him in heaven enabled Him to bear the shame on earth. In His final moments, Jesus focused on the joy God put before Him. He focused on the prize of heaven. By focusing on the prize, he was able not only to finish the race but to finish it strong.*

We see in this message that Jesus came to earth to show us the way to heaven, think about that. His overarching and complete love for us led Him to want to demonstrate for us the life that we need to lead if we wish to share heaven with Him for eternity. So he came to earth and spent 33 years demonstrating the love and belief that was needed by mankind to enable us to attain eternal life.

This fourth Week of Advent is the week of Love. This message from Max tells us that Jesus came because God loves us so much that he doesn't want any of us to miss out on spending eternity with him. All we have to do is believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save each of us from our sin. I believe this requires 4 things of us which I will now share. Pastor Don usually has a few points he tries to make with each of his sermons, so I want to try and do the same today. Here are the 4 things we need to do on earth to ensure our entry into heaven:

Point #1 - Love the loveable – This is generally pretty easy for us. This group of people includes most or, hopefully, all of our biological family, our church family, our chosen family, and various assorted other co-workers and friends that we may see regularly or not in our daily walk. These people generally think like us, behave like us, share common interests (like the Gators), and are generally quite easy to like and love and want to be around.

Point #2 - Love the unlovable – I have spent a lot of time on this topic in my weekly TGIF messages the past few months, or maybe years now. You may be quite tired of me talking on this topic. However, I know how difficult this is for many of us because a number of you have told me it is also the most difficult thing you also have to master. The reason for this is that over the past few years, we have seen so many acts of hatred occurring in our country and throughout the world that we have to question the motives of people who seem to proclaim hatred to others, and maybe to us as well. However, God is focused in His constant message to us that we are to love the unlovable just as we love our family, neighbors, and others because it is not our job to judge other people, and only God knows the true feelings of each person's individual heart. We will likely never know why their hearts are hardened, but God knows. We may never understand why they don't love as we do, but that is not our job, or our responsibility. So our job is to love all others as ourselves and trust in God. As Tina tells us each week in her Wednesday message, we are to Shine! Shine! Shine! as we demonstrate our love for God.... and that means to everyone we come across!!!! We can't do this only on our good days, we don't get a pass on bad days, our love for God needs to be our way of life every day we are blessed to wake up and have another day to share God's love with others.

In my recent TGIF, I shared "To love another person is to see the face of God" – it was my challenge to each of you, will you accept this challenge?? Also, I just read a Peggy Noonan editorial on Friday, and she shared the following comment - *In the Catholic faith you take a moment during Mass to pray for leaders at home and abroad. It has to be sincere when you say it or you're messing with God. Don't do that.* So Peggy is saying the same thing as Jean Valjean in Les Miserables. We should all be praying for our newly elected national and local leaders right now to be Godly leaders, and you need to be sincere in your prayer!

Check out this simple, but profound 2 verses of scripture!

1 John 4:7-8 - Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

What a simple, but very profound message for us to live by each day!

Point #3 – Show the love we have for God – We are to love God above all else. We are to love God and to show our love for God to everyone we cross paths with each day. We document this love for God through our service to other people and to Him, we must show that we care about others more than ourselves, and know that there are many people with needs that we can support both on an ongoing basis and also as needed, like with our recent hurricane relief. Such service will document how we demonstrate our love for God. This does not mean we must preach God to all those we come in contact with each day, but to be friendly and respectful to all. If others can see the happiness and joy we have in our life, they may wish for that same happiness in their life. If they ask us about our happiness, we can then explain our reason for it.

And finally,

Point #4 – Accept the love God has for us – Jesus showed His love for us in a twofold manner – (1) He came to earth to show us the path to heaven and then (2) He made the ultimate sacrifice for each of us, giving His life on the cross so that we might experience eternal life with Him. The people here today, and many Christians, all have accepted this gift from God, can we guide others to help them become aware of this beautiful gift for the rest of their lives that is available to all who ask and believe?

1 Corinthians chapter 13 is the most complete chapter in the Bible on the topic of love. This chapter is referred to as *The Greatest Gift* and it concludes in verse 13

1 Corinthians 13:13 – But now, faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Show your love for all mankind and for God through your daily walk and make sure you Shine!
Shine! Shine!

Let us pray –

Dear Heavenly Father:

Help us to love all others as you love us. Help us to show the world how much we love you by living a life of Godliness in service to you and to others. Help us to help others in need of love and kindness, guide us in our daily path every day, and keep us on the straight and narrow as we seek to live a life full of love for others and praise for you. Guide us and nourish us all the days of our lives, support us in our service to you as long as we have breath in our bodies. And then I pray that you will welcome each of us Home with You. Amen

Benediction: Numbers 6:22 – May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.