

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Lovify"
Dr. J. Dent

December 20, 2009
Advent IV
"Christmas Sunday"
Holy Communion

Love is a difficult subject to address. So many of us have had complicated and difficult experiences of love, that when we speak of love, it can become merely philosophical and theoretical, thus not connecting to our experience. What we really need is to be loved and to love others. But how can we deepen and open the reality of our lives to love if we are often not receiving love nor giving love the way we had hoped.

This difficulty may be compounded by romantic love. Romantic love lures a person into believing that their imagination of how a person might amazingly and ideally satisfy their love needs will become reality. In fact, the romantic vision often does no more than tease and underscore how much we expect and how little we experience. Not only do romantic notions complicate this subject, our culture and many of us confuse sexual experience with love. This too is unhelpful, although we would need full time to just look at these two subjects.

So how can we experience love, and even intensify our reception and giving of love while not being disillusioned further from the hopes that we have about loving? In a word, how can we "lovify"? "Lovify" is another coined word which means to experience love in a more intense and satisfying way.

Seeking to learn about how to love and be loved is a longer journey than we might expect. It is an outward journey to begin to understand how others perceive us, as caring, loving and sensitive, or as something else. Even going into this territory is uncomfortable because it causes us to reconsider how we think about ourselves. Maybe we might not like what individuals who are close to us would say if we asked them if they perceived us as caring, loving, sensitive or not.

On the other hand, this is perhaps the only way to get a grip on the reality of our lives. How do others perceive us? How do we perceive ourselves? What do we do with the gap between others' perceptions of ourselves and our own?

Here we go on the inward journey. Here we find out how we were treated as children and how that influences our reception and giving of love. Here we find out if we tend to be too hard on ourselves, or whether we tend to deny our faults and inability to love.

The inner journey also brings us into the realm of our spiritual life, where we find out how we are doing with God. Does God really love us? Do we really love God? And how do we know either of the answers to these central questions?

We know the Christmas and Advent stories show us the lengths to which God has gone to have relationship with us. We know that God the Son gave up everything to become one of us, to show us the full extent of God's love. But what if we still can't experience that love personally, or take it into ourselves? What do we do then?

We can choose to let others help us understand the love of God. That's part of the reason to come to church, to be a part of a community that is here to show us love. Yes, the community is broken. Some church leaders commit illegal acts. This and other parts of the church are not what they should be. Yet in the midst of this, we do experience others' love and concern for us. The church does give us a small picture of the grace and love and the friendship that we all desperately need. Because when you need love, only others will help you find it. It's not about finding some self-love method. It is about opening ourselves to others, and getting the help we need. It is often in small groups that we see the love of God in action. It is there we experience the kind of love that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13:

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

We need others to help us experience love. Our spouses, if we are married, can't do it all for us. If we are single or alone at home, we need others. And so the church is here to be a place to experience love. We need to put this into action and vision statements for us to be consciously promoting this part of who we are as the church. We certainly will experience the brokenness of others in the church. But we can also getting closer to God and one another.

My hope is for 2010 that everyone of you will experience this reality of love more and more.

Of course, we stand before the Lord's Table which is symbol of the depths of Jesus' love for us. It is here we experience anew that which was done so long ago for us. It is here we get a fresh start and a new shot at love. Here we hear the voice of love. So let us keep our ears open this season.

Here we hear the voices of the angels in Bethlehem, and the shepherds. Here we hear Mary singing over her unborn child, songs of justice, songs of God interventions. Here we hear Jesus facing all the temptations to rebel, but staying in a place that is God honouring and righteous, so that we might be saved from our sins, and know God and God's reality in our lives.

Here we hear the voice of love.

Let us pray.