

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
January 21 & 22, 2012
Rich Phenow
Vision Series: Love Others
Philippians 2:1-8**

Lord God Almighty, I pray that You would be in our hearts and in our minds, that You would be in our eyes and in our voices. I pray that in a powerful way Your words would move us and stir in our hearts. So speak to us, speak to our minds, and speak to our hearts. Thank You for Your amazing love for us. It is in the profound and great Name of Jesus that we pray together. Amen.

As you know, we have been in a short series since the beginning of the year about our vision as a church. It is the responsibility of us as leaders to keep casting that vision, to keep throwing it out there because vision has a way of leaking out of us, dripping out of us. I'm a very gourmet kind of chef, and one of the ways that I test if spaghetti is done is, I throw it at the wall. If it sticks, it is done. If it doesn't stick, it isn't done, so we are praying that our vision sticks. Our vision is simply that we as a community of faith are trying to *inspire all generations to follow Jesus, to love one another, and live missionally*. We want that to be part of the breath we breathe. We want that to be a part of our ethos as a community. We want people to know that by the way we live, the way we talk, and the way we love each other. Is that what we are doing as a church, as a community?

Two weeks ago John talked about *following Jesus*. He said that it is not about our degrees and our pedigrees and our qualifications. It is about getting close enough to Jesus so that the very dust from His robe falls on us. Last week John talked about *missional living*. We are people who are called out, sent by Jesus and given the authority to proclaim a message. He said that we are called out to be models of Christ to let others know that Jesus makes a difference because He has made a difference in our lives.

We switched the order of our vision statement so that we could accommodate this morning a holy-making moment in the life of our church when we cast out our Lay Care Ministers, both students and adults. We cast them out because they have been trained and equipped and empowered to *love others* by showing up. Now the truth of the matter is this, that Jim and Lee and Mary and Christine and you, Lois, and you, Meg, and Ted, all of us are called by name. We are called out to love others, to love others within the walls of this church and to love others out there, all around us.

This morning we are going to look at a text from Paul in Philippians 2:1-8. I want you to know that what Paul is doing, and I will give you the page in a second and have you open up to it, but what Paul is doing is talking about a sacrificial, outrageous, contagious, courageous love. He is talking about SOCC love, a love that we put on like we put on our socks—sacrificial “S,” outrageous “O,” contagious “C,” courageous “C.” That is the kind of love that we are called to.

Just a bit of short background on this text, what the apostle Paul is doing is sitting in a jail cell in Rome, sending a letter of encouragement, a letter of joy, back to this little church that he planted in Philippi. He is telling them that he is praying for them with joy and with thanksgiving. When I was reading it, I had the image of a coach in front of his team, telling his players what is essential in order for them to have their spiritual eyes fixed on the ball. He says, "Stay focused. Don't forget the fundamentals that I taught you. Stay together. Be united." He doesn't say, "Be unanimous." He says, "Be united. Don't get distracted." He says, "Fix your eyes on the sweet spot of Christ. Get your heads up so that you can be like Jesus. Make a difference. Be humble. Sacrifice in order to obtain to this outrageous, courageous way of loving." Look with me on page 1,748 of your pew Bible. What we do here is, we take out a pencil or a pen and we write on the text. We put an "Amen!" in the margin where it makes sense to us, or we circle the words and say, "Oh, yeah!" Not only so that it gets imbedded in our hearts but so that the next person who opens up to that text will see the "Oh, yeah! Amen!" and it will impact them and their faith as well. Let me read from the second chapter of Philippians, verses 1 through 8, entitled "Imitating Christ's Humility."

¹ Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

May God add a blessing to the reading of His Holy Word.

Keep this open and interact with it because I will refer back to these verses. What Paul is doing is giving us **the steps that we need to take to do a better job of loving others**. How are we to do that? In verse 4 Paul says we do that by not looking at ourselves and our own interests but the interests of others. **Paul says we are to be *other* focused.** We are to put aside ourselves and the things that consume us. We are not to have selfish ambition or vain conceit. Those are hard words to hear. Me, selfish? Conceited, self-absorbed, self-centered? Oh, no, that's not me. But many of us walk through life myopic, our eyes focused on ourselves. It is about us. It is about my happiness, not yours. It is about my search for meaning and success and significance. It is not about you. Really, it is about me.

Now I am not saying that those are bad things in and of themselves, but Paul says they are not what are to consume us. Right now many of us have these as real needs of ours, significance and happiness, but when they become the soul of our sole purpose, then our eyes are down and we can't focus on others. There is no room in the lens of my life for anybody else but me. It is really hard to live in a community of only one. Edward Hallowell, a psychiatrist, writes that for most people, the two most powerful, driving experiences of life are achieving and connecting.

Most of our time and energy fall into these two categories. Connecting is about our relational world. It is about forming lasting, life-giving relationships where there is an exchange of love; a giving and receiving. It is not about perfect relationships as connecting phenomena, but it is about relationships where forgiveness is asked for and granted; where we can say, "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you," relationships where we can say, "Thank you" and "I love you." I am not just talking about a relationship between a husband and wife. It is about deep, loving relationships with a child and a parent, between a brother and a sister, a friend and a friend, a college student to a college student, a roommate. It is about the kind of love that we share with neighbors and with grandparents.

Let me ask you a question? Do you need to be loved? Do you? Raise your hand if you need to be loved? Okay, amen! Let's say amen to that! I'm glad I am not the only one in the room who needs to be loved. Why then do so many of us say that we feel alone in this world, that we feel unknown? "Loneliness," Mother Teresa said, "is the leprosy of our modern-day culture." No one wants anybody else to know that we have leprosy. It is fascinating that we are constantly engaged in social networking, twitting and tweeting and facebooking. We are instant-messaging all the time, and we don't even have to talk to each other anymore voice to voice. We communicate like crazy, yet never has our culture felt more alone and unknown than right now.

We know what achieving has to do with. It has to do with success and outcomes and accomplishments. It is about what we achieve. It is about our desire to win and be on top. It is about our desire to look good, a deep desire for importance and for significance. It is about evidence-based outcomes. It is about measured outcomes. It is about accumulations and assets, but I would say that most of those things have a shelf life. They have a date where they lose their impact and flavor. They are temporal. Achievements, I think, in many ways have become an idol of our culture. Now hear me say this, it is not a bad thing to want to achieve. It is a good thing for the right reasons, but our achievements cannot define us. They cannot define who we are. It is about *whose* we are and *whom* those we are engaged with are.

You see, if I surrender my need for results and outcomes, suddenly success is God's job and not mine because I have a hard enough time just being faithful. The successful parts of what define us are really more up to God. I want to tell you here and now, I have few if any great achievements, but my greatest achievements are the people who love me in spite of me. Can you imagine what a saint I have married? Can you imagine what life is like with a character, a nut case, like me? Our children have to endure a goofball who asks the dumbest questions to their friends, and they are left with trying to explain me and that ain't no easy task.

I've never known anyone who has deep, life-sustaining, life-fulfilling relationships, who has mastered the life of giving and receiving, say to me, "I feel like a failure." I've never had anybody say that to me. I've heard people say that about their successes and their achievements, "I've failed over and over again," but I've never heard anyone say that. You see, we need to be in real, honest, open, non-judgmental relationships, where we can laugh and where we can cry, where we can fight and where we can dance, and where we can forgive and even die with each other. Amen to that? Amen! Just trying to keep you awake here. I just want you for a moment to see with me a visual reminder of that. Watch this.

(Film clip from Forrest Gump is shown.)

Now it could be a little edgy on a Sunday morning to view that but the truth of the matter is, it is a war picture. There is Forrest out ahead, running by himself, realizing he is all alone. Then in a sacrificial, outrageous, contagious way with love, Forrest runs back. He picks up four of his comrades. We couldn't show him picking up Lieutenant Dan because that was just a lot more verbal, and we couldn't bleep out every part of it, but Forrest turned back for what mattered most, his fellow warriors, his soldier buddies. Forrest even suffers a wound. He takes a bullet in his own buttocks. But what an example.

All around us we are in the battle together, calling out for help, and when we love each other, we need to rescue each other. Who have you pulled out of the battle? John Ortberg said that we are people who are in the *busy business*, that we measure ourselves by what we are doing, but most of us are headed nowhere fast. He said even more of us suffer from *hurried sickness* which is a condition of our soul. That is when our hearts and minds are preoccupied with ourselves and keep us from being connected to others in relationship, from being present.

In verses 5 and 6 Paul gives us our next step to take. He says **we have to put on a different attitude**. We can't do that kind of outrageous love on our own because we have to have the attitude of Christ, who stripped Himself of all of His Godly rights and walked our road of human life. He took on Himself the form of a humble servant who came to serve and to save. It is about serving the lonely and disconnected, the broken and the forgotten, the marginalized, possibly those sitting right next to you.

One of my top five favorite Rock and Rollers is a guy whom some of us know. He has a voice that once you have heard it, you can't let go of it. It is hard to forget. Who has heard of Bob Dylan? Anybody heard of Bob Dylan? Okay, thank you. There are a few of us. Five. This guy has a nasally, rhythmic-speaking, half-singing voice, a lot like mine. The 70s were good for Bob Dylan, and many would say that they were good for me because they think I am still living in them, but for a brief part of his life, Dylan talked about his faith. He performed and created an album called *Slow Train Coming*, which was a picture of his faith journey. One of my favorite songs on that album is a song called *Gotta Serve Somebody*.

You may be an ambassador to England or France
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

Okay, that was a brutal impersonation. Sorry, Bob. Last night when we went home Jody said, "Was that W. C. Fields without a cigar?" A couple of weeks ago we had a memorial service in this church for a guy named Todd Chowan, not a member of our church. It was an amazing opportunity for us to *be* the church. This sanctuary was full of people, very few of whom we knew. Todd was a young 45-year-old teacher in the Edina school system who helped create the French immersion program, taught French at the high school, and was a gifted musician. I met with Todd and his two daughters and his partner, Joel. We planned the celebration of his life

service, and it was an amazing time. A lot of the names on the back of the bulletin were people who were here ushering, Bill and Don and Jane and Mavis and Don and Jerry. It was an amazing outpouring of our love. We hosted it. We showed incredible hospitality. We had a reception downstairs that Blanche Raup was in charge of. Blanche's story was in the last CPC Life. She lost two children. Let me quote her because I quote her all the time. She said, "When we do receptions for people who aren't from CPC, we try to shine on them even more because we hope maybe they'll hear or see Jesus through what we are doing." Wow! How God must have shone through us when we became the church that day. I had somebody ask me, "Why would we do all that for a non-member?" and I said, "That's exactly why we would do it." It was a moment of incredible pride for me in what we can become as a church - loving, grace-filled servants welcoming folks into our presence.

A very close friend of ours, Kim Thompson, told me about a book. She said, "Rich, it is a must read for you," *Tattoos on the Heart*, true stories about a current Jesuit priest, Father Gregory Boyle, known by the homies as Father G. He is in the gang capital of Los Angeles. This is a guy with an attitude. This guy has an attitude of Christ. I've read this book twice in 10 days. I found myself belly-laughing at his humor and creative story telling and in the next few minutes, I'm bawling my eyes out with a cleansing cry. You see, Father G's whole vision in ministry is about redemption. He is constantly reminding his homies that they are of great value and precious to God, that God loves them unconditionally with a power that can fight against despair and loneliness and self-destruction and shame. Just let me read a short excerpt.

Once after dealing with a particularly exasperating homie named Sharkey, I switched my strategy and decided to catch him in the act of doing the right thing. I can see I have been too harsh and exacting with him, and he is, after all, trying the best he can. I tell him how heroic he is and how the courage he now exhibits in transforming his life far surpasses the hollow 'bravery' of his barrio past. I tell him that he is a giant among men. I mean it. Sharkey seems seem to be thrown off balance by all this and silently stares at me. Then he says, "Damn, G...I'm gonna tattoo that on my heart."

All kinds of stories about giving incredible value. Paul gives us the third step of how we are to do this outrageous, contagious love. Look at verses 1 and 2. He says that if you have experienced love and comfort from God through a loving faith, then **we have to be like-minded and share it in one spirit and purpose**. Today we are going to experience a new thing for us in the life of this church. We are going to experience this one purposeful love that Paul is talking about because others, these four young students, have experienced it themselves. Today we are going to lay hands on Sarah Manning, Louie Nanne, Andrew Allen, and Kiersti Phenow. It is from the love and encouragement that these students have received that their faith is vibrant and that they are like-minded and have put on an attitude of Christ in a sacrificial, outrageous, contagious, courageous way.

I want to illustrate that by calling up Sarah and Louie to begin with. I want you to come up here and stand next to me. These are folks that Kiersti has spent a lot of time trying to explain me to. Sarah Manning and Louie Nanne are part of the Lay Care Ministry student-wise, and they are doing outrageous things. I want you to hear from them in their own words. Sarah, what are some of the kinds of outrageous love that you are showing and that you are given?

Sarah: We started out making a Facebook group, and basically on that we talked about

whom we want to love and how we want to love them. We make care packages, and we pray together, and we just connect through the Facebook page and find out whom we can affect and show Jesus' love to.

Rich: They show up in remarkable ways. A young student had a thyroid surgery, and they showed up in her home with a care package and a scarf. Thoughtful stuff! These kids are doing it in an outrageous way. They are students. They are teaching us how to love. So, Louie, tell us, what kind of impact has it had on you to be showing up and how is it helping your faith and your own walk with Christ?

Louis: Well, I think I can speak on behalf of all of us when I say that we have easy-going lives. We are all kind of having an affirmation of Christ within us, but just like Forrest Gump in that video, we are always trying to go out of our way and make other people's lives. I guess that kind of helps our affirmation ourselves with our Christian beliefs and values. I know for myself, it has kind of solidified my faith. It has helped me overcome so many things, personal issues, because now I am able to go out of the way a little more easily and just kind of do things with a Christ-minded attitude. I think I owe a lot of it to all the people I'm with because they help me kind of get through everything. I've been one of the victims of the care packages myself. My grandfather passed and those kids, although I'm on the team myself, came over with a package for me and just showed me what a great community of children in Christ and just people in general that we have. It has been a real testimony to my faith. I just hope that my faith keeps expanding and that I am able to grow closer to Christ through this.

Rich: These are two tangible reminders of outrageous, other-focused kind of love. They are students putting on an attitude. I love their attitude, a Christ-like attitude, humbly serving and giving of themselves, but they can't do it on their own. They are doing it together. They are showing up in incredible ways, and God is using them, impacting their faith and their lives. What a great, great image of the body of Christ, the church. *This* is the church. It fires me up. Amen!

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.