

# Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

June 26, 2016

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

I John 4:7 - 5:4

## First Love

The story goes about the pastor who went to a new church and preached her first sermon there. Then the next week she preached the same sermon. The following week, again the same sermon. And the next... Finally someone in the church asked what was up, and she replied, "Well, once you start doing what I suggest in this sermon, I'll move on to the next one!"

It seems that that is what John is doing in this long section which has as its theme - LOVE!

And while to say, *God Loves You*, might seem like a cliché, really knowing this and really living out of this truth is what the Christian life is all about.

The theme for the Mission Trip this year is *First Love*. Because the one who FIRST loved and loves us is God.

And when we tap into this love, and are vehicles for this love, we have no idea the positive impact we can have on others!

Miss Thompson taught Teddy Stallard in the fourth grade. He was a slow, unkempt student, a loner shunned by his classmates. The previous year his mother died, and what little motivation for school he may have once had was now gone. Miss Thompson didn't particularly care for Teddy either, but at Christmas time he brought her a small present. Her desk was covered with well-wrapped presents from the other children, but Teddy's came in a brown sack. When she opened it there was a gaudy rhinestone bracelet with half the stones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume.

The children began to snicker but Miss Thompson saw the importance of the moment. She quickly splashed on some perfume and put on the bracelet, pretending Teddy had given her something special. At the end of the day Teddy worked up enough courage to softly say, "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother . . . and her bracelet looks real pretty on you too. I'm glad you like my presents."

After Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and prayed for God's forgiveness. She prayed for God to use her as she sought to not only teach these children but to love them as well. She became a new teacher. She lovingly helped students like Teddy, and by the end of the year he had caught up with most of the students.

Miss Thompson didn't hear from Teddy for a long time. Then she received this note: "Dear Miss Thompson, I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class. Love, Teddy Stallard."

Four years later she got another note: "Dear Miss Thompson, They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Teddy Stallard."

Four years later: "Dear Miss Thompson, As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year. Love, Teddy Stallard."

Miss Thompson went to the wedding and sat where Teddy's mother would have sat, because she let God use her as an instrument of encouragement.

God will use each of you who are traveling to Queens....  
And God will use everyone who's staying home as well!  
Obviously you don't need to travel away from home to respond with love to the love God showers upon us.

A few days ago, I stumbled upon something I wrote a few years ago (2013). I was clicking through my funerals folder as I was preparing for the funeral for John Fortier....

Maureen Bascom had died...young....her son Alex was 7 at the time. They had a pastor from NH come to do the funeral service, but as the host church and pastor, I gave a word of welcome. Here's what I shared that day:

Welcome Alex and Brad, Carol and Janice, family and friends, all who knew and loved Maureen.  
Welcome to this church, which because of your presence in it, is now your church.  
But mostly, welcome to the love of God. A love which is different from the love that people share together. Because God's love is big - so big that we use words like

ETERNAL and  
UNCONDITIONAL and  
SACRIFICIAL and  
MYSTERIOUS to describe it.

Which are all just fancy ways of saying God's love is FOR YOU and FOREVER.

And we know this because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which though it took place 2,000+ years ago, assures us that there is life on the "other side."

And not just for Maureen, but for you as well. The ONLY way to endure the weight of this day and this death is to place it in the loving hands of God our Heavenly Father, who will never ever leave us.

This truth - that God's love will never leave us - is called Grace - and it is Amazing!

And so, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, I welcome you not only to this house, but to the love and grace of God!

God's love - it may be a cliché - but it's so much more than that... It's real.

Amen