

Then Jonathan said to David: “By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? ¹³ But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. ¹⁴ But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, ¹⁵ and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.”

¹⁶ So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the LORD call David’s enemies to account.” ¹⁷ And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. (1 Samuel 20:12-17)

What Does Love Do?

A few months ago I was talking to a mom about her daughter who was being a little moody. The mom said, “She just has to get used to the idea that I’m still her mother and I would still jump in front of a car for her.” That’s love, right? All our lessons this morning focus on love. Love is a word you hear all the time in church and also in popular culture. But sometimes, I think we focus too much on the feeling side of love. Popular music sings about how love makes us feel, how it changes your life, how wonderful it is to experience. Those things are all true, and you can never take feelings out of the equation when you talk about love. But when the Bible talks about love, feelings are in the background. The Bible focuses on what love does. Jesus living and dying and rising for us is pure love. God the Father sacrificing his only Son for us is pure love. The Holy Spirit taking our sinful, unbelieving hearts and giving us faith and all the comfort and strength and joy that goes with it is pure love. So when God talks about us and our love for each other, he spends very little time on what it feels like. He focuses on what it does. So this morning as we look at the future king David and his best friend Jonathan, we want to use their conversation to answer the simple question: **What does love do?**

I.

Jonathan and David show us that **love takes risks**. Jonathan was the son and heir of King Saul. David was an officer in Saul’s army. But Jonathan and David had a close bond. Jonathan knew that God was displeased with his father and had promised to make David king in Saul’s place. King Saul knew it, too. And his reaction was fairly predictable. He feared and hated David. Twice, Saul tried to kill David with a spear and he had sent men to his house to kill him. So David fled. But Jonathan continued to love his friend.

While David was in hiding, Jonathan came to him and they had the conversation in our text for this morning. Just meeting with the king’s enemy was treason. But Jonathan promised to talk to Saul and find out what his intentions were. And if Saul was determined to kill David, Jonathan promised to warn his friend and help him escape. Now David and Jonathan did not live in a democracy with independent courts and police officers who would even arrest a leading politician. Saul was the supreme court, president and congress all rolled into one. If he decided to kill someone, no could stop him. History is full of kings who killed their own sons because they thought those sons were disloyal. Jonathan was taking his own life into his hands just by defending David to his father. Helping him escape would only make matters worse. Jonathan knew that.

Why would Jonathan take such a risk? Because he loved his friend. Now, it’s a sad reality about the times we live in, but I have to say at this point that there was nothing homosexual about David and Jonathan’s relationship. They were just two very close friends. They had served in battle together. They shared the same faith and commitment to the people of Israel. If there had been buses in Israel, they would’ve been willing to jump in front of a bus for each other. In fact, Jonathan knew that God had promised to make David king. As Saul had told him, if David became king, Jonathan couldn’t. Jonathan accepted that. He was willing to give up the throne for his friend.

What does this Christian love teach us? Real love is more than just a feeling. It works for the good of the person I love. It puts aside my own interests and sometimes even my own safety to benefit the one I love. Does our love drive us to take the same kinds of risks today? We all know situations in which someone feels like they have been treated unfairly. What have we done to help them? Jesus said, **“Blessed are the**

peacemakers for they will be called sons of God.” But you know what I’ve found? It’s hard to be a peacemaker. If you try to be fair, you often make both sides mad at you because both sides want you to take their side. If you try to say things that someone needs to hear in order to resolve their situation, many times they make you pay. They pout and stomp off and treat you like you’re the problem. Of course, if you go to the boss and ask them to reconsider or at least to sit down with someone who seems to be being treated unfairly, you might find your own job is in jeopardy, or at least that there will be consequences at work. All those things are good reasons to stay out of it. It’s not your business anyway.

But love always works for the good of the people we love. That always means taking risks. You risk someone taking advantage of you, or using up your time and effort, and then failing to appreciate all that you’re doing. Love is hard. It has start over every day. If a mother works hard all day on Monday, feeding her kids and making sure that they have clean clothes and that they get their homework done, does that mean she’s off the hook on Tuesday? No! If she doesn’t feed them on Tuesday, it doesn’t matter that she did on Monday. And when it comes to love, taking the easy way out is almost always wrong. It’s easy to lose your temper. It’s hard to bite you lip. It’s easy to pout and say nothing. It’s hard to come and talk things out. It’s easy to hold a grudge and stay mad. It’s hard to let things go and try to see it from the other person’s point of view. But love does the hard thing.

Is that the way you and I live? Don’t we all fall short of showing real love over and over again? Every congregation I’ve ever seen had people in it who hurt each other. In every church I’ve served, there have been members who didn’t like me and couldn’t wait for me to move on. Sometimes, that was because I failed to act in love toward them. I took the easy way out and hurt them. Sometimes, it’s because they refused to take my words and actions in the kindest possible way. Always, it was because we are sinners. Sin never loves, not the way God uses that word.

For all that sin, we all deserve God’s punishment in hell forever. But Jesus showed us the greatest love in the history of the universe. The Son of God left his throne in heaven and took on human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Then he lived in our place. He endured all the pain that comes with life in a sinful world. He suffered all that sin does to us. He even went to the cross and suffered hell and death there because that’s what our lack of love deserves. Jesus let his Father pour all the hell and all the anger of all the sin of all the world out on him. That was love. He died in our place. Then he rose. When he rose, he opened heaven for us. In love, he sent that gospel message out to every one of us and gave us faith. In love, he tells us over and over again that we are forgiven for all our failures to love, for all times we took the easy way out, for all the selfishness of our hearts and our lives. In baptism, in communion, in sermons and private confession, he heals us again and again and again. He promises that he will be with us to the very end of the age, that he will do all that we need – even the hard things – to bring us home to heaven. That’s love.

And in love, he works through all those promises to teach us to love here and now while we wait for heaven. He taught that to Jonathan. The heart of Jonathan’s love for David was Jonathan’s faith in God and his promises. The heart of our love for each other is our faith in Christ and his promises. You have been loved every day of your life. Reflect that love of Christ on each other. Take the risk that every act of love is.

II.

When Jonathan affirmed his love and made promises to David, he asked David to make a promise in return. Now, he didn’t ask for special honors or positions. He just asked that when the situation was reversed and David became king and he could do whatever he wanted and no one could stop him, that David would treat Jonathan and his family with love. He asked David to swear an oath to that. Then he trusted that David would do it. That illustrates another way that love works. **Love trusts.**

Once again, Jonathan was taking a risk with his love. He had no ability to force the issue. All he could do was trust David or go over to Saul’s side and become David’s enemy. He chose to trust. Now, David made that easy, by being a man of character who was Jonathan’s true friend. And as it worked it out, Jonathan and Saul died in battle on the same day. But as soon as David became king, he looked for survivors from Jonathan’s family that he could show kindness to for Jonathan’s sake. The trust was well placed. But you never know that when you begin to trust. There is always the possibility that your trust will be betrayed, even by people who want to keep their promises. We’re all sinners. We can’t control all events. We make mistakes. We give in to our sinful flesh. We find things to be so complicated that it isn’t as easy as just doing what we

said we would do. All those things make trust hard. If you have ever suffered a betrayal of trust, it's probably even harder still. Your heart rebels at taking that risk again.

But St. Paul said, "**Love always trusts.**" Those words show us that trust is not an emotional reaction that we have to the people around us. Trust is finally an act of will. We choose to trust. Sometimes, it's an easy choice. Small children trust their parents because all day every day, those parents hover around them, keeping them safe, giving them love, feeding, clothing and playing with them. But sometimes, it's much harder. Sometimes, the person we need to trust doesn't deserve it because they have sinned against us. Because our love is not perfect, we fail to trust. But God's standard is still the same: love always trusts.

What do we do? We begin by recognizing that it is our own sinful weakness that cannot overcome our trust issues. We repent of our unwillingness and even our inability to love as Jesus loved. Then we cling to our Savior who died and rose for us and took away all that sin and failure. We cling to Jesus who lived the perfect life of love in our place and we trust that his trust counts for our failure. And we pray for the Holy Spirit to grant us healing and strength of faith so that our love is more like the love St. Paul described, more like the love that Jonathan lived. We trust God's ability to give that healing, even if we can't see how he will get us there. We talk with fellow Christians who can help us to heal. We make every effort to trust. It may not go well at first. We stumble and struggle. But under Christ, we try.

Now, when I say that, I don't mean to bind your conscience. The scriptures themselves don't make this absolute. When someone has cheated on their spouse, God calls the spouse to forgive them, but God does not require them to live together as man and wife anymore. He does not require that spouse to renew that trust. But he does want that spouse to heal and learn to trust other people again. God does not expect us to trust enemies of the gospel. They work for the devil. Paul was talking about relationships among believers. I could go on, but you get the point. But it doesn't change the fact that God's standard of love is still "love always trusts." God calls us to trust him and grow in our love and to be people who put ourselves at risk by trusting each other.

It's tough to do. But we aren't in this alone. The Holy Spirit lives in our hearts and he renews us day by day. Jesus is with us to the very end of the age and he lives in us and strengthens us to live in faith and love. God the Father watches over us and guides our lives so that every day we are exactly where he wants us to be. He makes it possible for us to grow in love. My friends, grow in love. And choose the path of trust. Choose to take risks for each other. You can, because Jesus has made you new. He is the perfect model of love. He trusts you to live in love today. Trust him and love each other. Amen.