

“SERVICE AND SACRIFICE: GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

November 11, 2012, 6:00PM

Sermon Texts: John 15:12-13; I John 3:16-18

John 15:12-13 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

I John 3:16-18 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Introduction.

Today is Veteran’s Day or as it used to be called, Armistice Day. In British commonwealth countries and France it’s known as Remembrance Day or Poppy Day. We thank God today for the service and the sacrifice of 24.5 million veterans in America. Many of you know the history of Veteran’s Day, but let me briefly recount it by way of introducing our topic this evening.

WWI, known as the Great War or the War to End all Wars, ended on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918 when an armistice agreement was signed by German and Allied leaders in a railway carriage in the Compiègne (com-pin-yea) forest in France. At that moment all became quiet on the Western Front.

One year later President Woodrow Wilson signed a declaration that a moment of silence be observed on what was called Armistice Day. Seven years later in 1926 Congress passed a resolution for the annual observance of Armistice Day. And twelve years after that in 1938 it became a national holiday. Finally in 1954 President Eisenhower changed the name from Armistice Day to Veterans Day.

The Unknown Soldier tomb in Arlington National Cemetery holds the body of an unknown soldier who was a casualty of WWI. He was laid to rest on Nov. 11, 1921. Since then other unknown soldiers have been laid to rest there and it is now a tradition that the President lays a wreath on the tomb every Nov. 11, as President Obama did today.

On Veteran’s Day we give thanks and show appreciation to those who served and sacrificed to protect our freedoms.

As our freedoms erode in this country all the more reason to remember and give thanks for what we have had for so long, and the price that was paid to gain and secure our freedoms. When someone gives you a gift it is good to give back thanks.

What is a Veteran.

What is a veteran? A veteran is a person who honorably served and sacrificed in one of the armed forces of our country during war or peacetime. They are people who counted the cost, assessed the risk, realized it was great, realized they might die and they went anyway.

To be a good soldier you have to be willing to serve and sacrifice for your country. You have to have complete commitment to the mission, complete faith in the commander, complete discipline and the ability to follow orders, and you have to be willing, if necessary, to die for the sake of others.

That's what it takes to be a soldier and to become a veteran, and that definition works whether we are talking about the United States Army or the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Church of Jesus Christ is an all-volunteer army made up of soldiers of the cross who have complete faith in their commander and will follow Him anywhere, wherever He calls. They have complete commitment to the mission. They exhibit complete discipline and obedience, they follow orders willingly and gladly. And they are willing to lay down their life for their leader.

One of the reasons they are willing to lay down their life is that their leader first laid down His life for them.

Jesus is the greatest veteran of the greatest war.

In the great war against the principalities and powers of hell, Jesus counted the costs, assessed the risk, realized that He wouldn't just possibly die, but that He would in fact die, and came anyway.

Philippians 2:5-8 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The greatness of Christ's love is seen in **two ways, how costly His gift is and how underserved its recipients are.**

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, ESV). Jesus shows us the greatness of His love for us by its costliness.

"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8, ESV). Jesus shows us the greatness of His love by His willing sacrifice for those who don't deserve it.

Think about it. God could have just spoken a word and made our redemption a done deal.

That He sacrificed His only Son in a terrible suffering testifies just how great His love for us and our salvation really is.

When Jesus gives this costly love to those who do not deserve it, in fact, freely gives it to those who deserve the exact opposite, it gives Him the authority to command us to love in the same way.

What kind of heart would be unmoved by His example? How hard must a heart be to not respond to so rich a gift?

If this is how God loves us while we were yet sinners, while we were still His enemies, then no wonder that He commands us to love each other and to love our enemies.

This is my commandment.

John 15:12-13 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

God first loved us *so that* we can love each other. As He has loved us so are we to love one another. Don’t love the way your spouse loves, don’t love the way your neighbor loves, don’t love the way your pastor loves, love the way your Savior loves.

We cannot think too highly of this love, nor can we think too much about it, nor can we strive too much to put it into practice.

Our Christian duty is to love and the greatest love is to sacrifice oneself for another. Soldiers and missionaries and mothers in my mind exemplify this commandment the most consistently of any people I know. They are laying down their rights and interests and even their own life for others.

The fundamental truth of these verses is that Christianity is not just defined by doctrine. If all you have is sound doctrine you don’t have enough. If you have sound doctrine but are unloving, hot tempered, sharp tongued, foul mouthed, harsh, malicious, disagreeable, have a critical spirit, are full of mean words, cutting remarks, sarcasm, slander, wrath and anger, then your sound doctrine will do you no good.

That kind of sound doctrine is a scandal and a lie. You will be among those who say, “Lord, Lord,” but to whom Jesus says, “Depart from me I do not know you.”

“Where there is little love there is little grace” (J.C. Ryle, John, Vol. III, p. 127). Where there is no love there is no grace, no work of the Holy Spirit, no truth to our profession and no reality to our religion.

Love is the mark of a Christian.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This is the mark of a Christian. In his heart you will find love, not hate. His general attitude toward others will be love. There is no such thing as loving God without loving those who belong to God.

Philippians 3:3-5 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Love in deed and truth.

1 John 3:16-18 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

John talks a lot about love. But he doesn't just talk about it, he also shows us what love is and how to put it into action. He moves from teaching to application. By being practical he of course leaves us without any excuse. We can't say we didn't know or no one showed us or it was too hard to figure out.

John reasons from the greater to the lesser. So few of us will actually literally lay down our life for another. But what about seeing a brother with a need and having enough abundance to meet that need? If we don't even do that, then how can we say there is any love in us?

We are only bound to help a brother to the extent of our own resources, but at least to that extent. God tests our love by telling us to love our brothers and sisters.

Love looks around and love sees needs and love moves to meet those needs. Love doesn't walk by on the other side of the road, love stops and asks how it can help.

Love asks if it can come over to rack leaves, clean gutters, clean out flower beds, bring a meal, offer to baby sit, take a turn in the nursery, volunteer at the food bank, visit a shut-in. Love does. Love does something. Love acts, it gets up and goes. Love expresses itself. (Chris Roos)

Jesus didn't just think about Himself or what it would cost Him to come to earth. He didn't complain or argue about His rights, or say that He was above this sort of thing.

He thought about us, He thought about what would be best for us. He thought about our needs and interests over His own.

This is true love when we forget about ourselves and freely surrender our rights and interests for the good and interests of another.

Being willing to serve and sacrifice and sacrifice to the point of laying down our life is Christ-like. It honors and glorifies Christ and what He did and it shows how much we believe in Him and trust Him with our life. He who loses his life will gain his life.

Now we all know that none of our love is equal to Christ. None of us loves perfectly and very few of us actually lay down our life for another. And of course none of our deaths can accomplish as much as Christ's. This is a call to an attitude, to a mindset, that we might have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, a humility, a willingness to serve and give.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. It's how husbands show their love for their wives, how mothers show their love for their children, how soldiers show their love for their country and how God shows His love for us.

Application and conclusion.

***1 Thessalonians 4:9-10** Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, 10 for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.*

Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

Let this mind be in you that was in our veterans when they went.

Let this mind be in you that is in the minds of thousands of Christians who are laying down their very lives this week for their Savior and for their testimony.

Let this mind be in you that is in their minds as they gladly suffer and sacrifice and die for the sake of another.

Let this mind be in you as you go out into this week to serve and sacrifice and give and love.

Let us prove we have the mind of Christ by how we love others not in word, not in tongue but in deed and truth.

If you think this was a good sermon, don't just say it was, do something for someone else to prove it was a good sermon.

Just do something. Give a little back. Consider what Christ has done for you and consider what others have done for you and do something for someone else. Think about it, be intentional about it.

And if you don't think this was a very good sermon, then at least improve it by doing something good for someone else. Then at least something good will come out of this sermon.

1 John 3:18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

John 15:12-13 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Praise God for those who have gone before us to show us how, veteran soldiers, veteran missionaries and countless veteran saints.