



President Walton's February 2021 Message

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Put Love in Action



The older I get the more I find certain memories still seem fresh after many years. When I was a senior in high school I had an required English class on Shakespeare. Mr. McFadden was one of my favorite English teachers, very dramatic, and very excited about making Shakespeare come to life. One of the sonnets that we had to memorize was Sonnet 116. In fact, in my mind I can still hear Mr. McFadden, adopting a theatrical English accent, sharing it with us for the very first time. It was a “love” sonnet, and it goes like this:

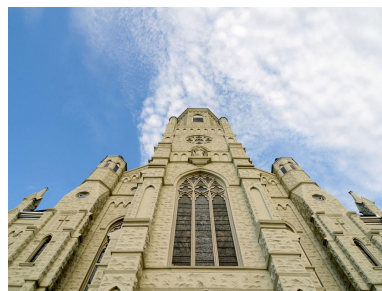
*Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.*

Admittedly, the first time I heard it I had no idea what it meant. In the process of memorizing this sonnet I learned it was all about the depth and commitment of romantic love, something that I would only truly discover a few years later when I met my wife. In this month, when we celebrate love, something the retailers have been promoting since December 26, 2020, understand there is a truer and even deeper love. It's the love God has for each of us through His Son, Jesus.

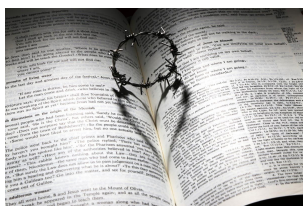
In 2021, only a few days following Valentine's Day, many Christians across the world will embark on a journey that leads us to a Cross which displays the depth of God's love for us. How often the story has been told and how familiar it has become. Even many non-believers know the story, or at least know about it. Thom Rainer did some research back in 2012 and found that non-Christians really desire to understand Christianity, but the consensus among those outside the Church is it is an insider's club, and they are not welcome. Combine this with fewer and fewer Christians willing to share their faith, believing the myth that non-believers will not listen or are not interested in our faith, and

who do not take the time to build relationships outside of their circle of Christian friends, which further builds the “club” belief.

The Church in our day faces, among other things, a public relations problem. The world around us is looking for love in all the wrong places, and we have often failed to exercise the love commanded by Jesus. As we move into this month when love is all around us, complete with hearts and cupids, may God’s Spirit inspire us to move from talking about love to talking about God’s love, then moving to putting it into action in the right place.



How can we best do this? It can be as simple as sharing the love of Jesus with someone living in fear, despair or without hope. All around us people are grieving—grieving the loss of a pre-COVID lifestyle, grieving personal losses, grieving the rapidly changing culture all around us. We can actually invite folks to join us for church. There are also more concrete ways to share the love of Jesus within the community, for the sake of the Gospel. Most communities have plenty of opportunities from food banks to volunteering at local schools to any number of human care ministries. This isn’t about church growth, but about Kingdom growth—connecting people to Jesus, who graciously loves all. One thing many congregations have learned in the past year is you do not need to be on campus to share Jesus!



The love of God is made manifest in Jesus, who willingly laid down His life for all sinners. Jesus is God’s love incarnate. His love brings hope and peace to believers, but it was never the intention of Jesus for it to remain with the receiver. He gave us His love to give it away, beginning in the household of faith, and then moving into the world. Jesus made this very clear to His disciples in the days leading up to His crucifixion. In John 13 Jesus said, “**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. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Jesus didn’t make this optional. In fact, Jesus commands us to love each other. The only time Jesus literally “commands” believers is in regard to love. Everything else flows from love. In 1 John 4 John writes, “**If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.**” We will fail to love each other, fail to offer forgiveness, fail to recognize the opportunities, Jesus points us back to the perfect example in Himself, as He showers us again and again with His love, forgiveness and grace.

Chief among the fruits of the Spirit is love! The Holy Spirit continues to “grow” this fruit within believers. John writes, in His First Epistle, “**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**” As we grow in God’s love, His love, working through the Holy Spirit, inspires our love for each other, and empowers our love for the world around us.

My prayer is that we begin to understand the new normal ahead, and how we can better **BE** the church reflecting the love of Jesus the Son in 2021! There is no shortage of opportunity to share the love of Jesus. All around us, even within the church, people are seeking genuine love. We, who have experienced the steadfast love of God in Jesus, can move His love beyond words and into action. By the way, this is why Valentine was sainted and remembered for sharing the love of Jesus and putting it into action. People saw the love of Jesus flowing in Valentine’s life. His is a fascinating story, inspired, not by cupid, but by Jesus. May Jesus also inspire our love for the world He died to save, not just on Valentine’s Day, but every day! Let us walk in His love, as we journey to the Cross in this season of love!



In His love,
Greg