

## Love Is a Three-lettered Word

From the sermon title, you might conclude that either I can't spell or can't count.

"Love" is a three letter word only if you spell it the way we used to back in the day, **L-U-V**.

In truth, my spelling is atrocious and my ciphering worse, but the three letter to which I'm referring is another word for **L-U-V**

It's the very first word of the prayer Jesus taught us, when he said, "Pray this way: **Our** Father."

That's the three letter word for love....**O-U-R**.

Jesus said, pray "Our Father" ...not "My Father" which would be a lot easier and less complicated...

You know....me and God...God and me....me, myself, and I, and Thee.

Oh no, Jesus says....OUR...

God is your Father and God is my Father....which makes us what? Kinfolks.

This truth is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian, and is as clear as the cross of Jesus.

What is the greatest commandment?

"Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength...."

That's the vertical dimension of life with God..

"And," Jesus said, "The second is like unto it"...not to be separated from it...."Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

That's the horizontal dimension....the "ourness" of our faith.

And that "our" is powerful!! So very powerful!!

Thomas Pettepiece, in his book, ***Visions of a World Hungry***, writes movingly of an Easter spent as a political prisoner in a Soviet gulag.

He and the other prisoners there had lost their homes, their furniture, everything they owned....their families broken up, their children left wandering in streets, their mothers in one gulag, their fathers in another.

It was Easter Sunday and there was not one single cup in their ward.....no bread no wine, no cup to celebrate communion with the risen Christ.

But a group of believers gathered anyway....without elements...to celebrate the communion of empty hands.

The non-Christians said...."We'll help you by making noise.....silence, singing and words of institution would have drawn the guards' attention.

Thomas began,  
"We remember today the prison, the torture, the death, and the resurrection victory of our Lord Jesus.

The bread is his body, given for all humanity. The fact that we have no bread reminds us of the millions of human beings who like us, are hungry.

The wine, which we do not have, is the blood of Jesus, one blood, for one people, no difference of race or class, one family."

He held out his empty hands to the left and the right, his neighbors put their empty hands atop his, all the same around the circle..

Then he said, "Jesus said, 'Take, eat, do this in remembrance of me.'"

They raised their hands to heaven, then to their mouths, kissing hands, receiving the mystical body of Jesus in silence..

The invisible cup, they did the same way....

In the end, they embraced....

A while later, a non- Christian prisoner came up to him.

"You people have something special....something I do not have....something I wish I had."

We have that something here in this church, don't we....this three lettered love called "our".

We are an "Our."

It's a powerful "Our".

Why in the last few weeks, that loving belonging to each other has been expressed by a brother, shirtless and dripping sweat in the heat, trimming a sister's shrubbery, then showing up in the height of a hurricane, wading in her flooded basement.

That ourness has led one sister and two friends to the nursing home to share a bridge game with another of our sisters, A respite of joy for one who life has become a struggle to endure.

It led family from here to sister Betty Rose and brother CV's, into the muddy muck of a mighty flooded mess.

This ourness is deeper than blood ties....its meant to be.

Remember, Jesus was teaching....

Interrupted...

"Jesus, some folks are here for you. They say they're your mother and your brothers."

And what does Jesus say?

He looks out at the crowd and says "You are mother to me, you are brothers to me, if God is the Father you obey."

So take a look around you...

Look around you now, and see your blood kin.....and those you love as much or more than blood kin.....and those you don't know... those you know, but don't particularly care for...those you don't care for at all.

We are an "our".

The early believers in Jesus took that our so seriously, they stopped using words like my and mine.....they said, "If there are tools, they are our tools'

if there is trouble it is our trouble, if there is stuff it's our stuff, even the hardest of all, not my money, but our money.

"No one said that anything he possessed was his own."

The Apostle Paul said it this way, "You are an our....a body, one body. You cant separate any more than an eye can say....ahhh...I don't like this particular body, I'm going to roll around and see if I can find something a little more suitable.

NO NO NO!" Paul says.

"When one of you suffers, all the members of they body suffer. When one of you rejoices, all rejoice."

When you hit your finger with a hammer, its not just your finger that hollers....your whole body cries "OWWW" or whatever you cry when you hit your finger with a hammer.

And when you eat an ice cream sandwich....its not just your mouth that delights...but your whole body with all its parts says ymmmmm...all the way down to your toes.

This is what love means....celebrating the good that happens to each other like it has happened to us....struggling with the suffering that weighs another down like it has happened to you....**because it has!**

There's a name for that radical notion.

It's called "church."

It shouldn't surprise us then, that when God sent his Son Jesus into this world. there was a wideness in his mercy like the wideness of the sea.

His "Our" included people who didn't fit and didn't matter and didn't count and clearly didn't deserve.....which is the main reason we nailed him to a tree in the first place, trying to pin down the arms that insisted on embracing the unembraceable.

But even there he wrapped his "Our" around a thief, dying beside him. When Christ spread his arms out on the cross, it was the world he loved, and showed us how big our our should be.

But the oneness of God is more radical, even than that.

It reaches across space and time, it holds on even in death....the great enemy who hates the hand holding loving circle of our oneness.....and tries to snatch hands away from it.

But Jesus broke the power of death....that is what we celebrate today.....he absolutely shattered the power of death....

He rose from death, came to his followers.....and what did he do?

He took their hands and relished in the unbroken circle of love....

I will be with you.....always....even to the end of the age.

Since resurrection day that circle has swelled from 12 to 12 gazillion....a crowd the writer of Revelation says cannot be numbered.

Did you hear what this crowd says to us on this All Saints remembrance day?

**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> We write this to make our joy complete.**

I count 15 first person plural pronouns in 4 verses....

And here is what those we, our, and us's are saying....

They are together in a great "Our" ...God the Father, and with the Lord Jesus and his Spirit,  
and the ones we have loved whom we have lost for a while.

We think we have lost them, but beyond what our eyes can see our ears hear and our minds can imagine, they have gathered in a great belonging....longing for us, so that their joy may be complete and the circle joined eternally.

"We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses....so let us run with perseverance the race set before us."

There is a maze on the grounds of Leeds Castle southeast of London.

It's geometric confusion is formed by high hedges as in the Shining....

You start on the outside and try to work your way to the center...where there is a raised hill, a platform of stone.....

Once you make it there you have a birds eye view of the other poor souls who are struggling to find their way.

My girls and I decided to make it a kind of race...to see who could make it to the center first.

As I have a superior sense of direction, I knew that victory would not be long in coming.

Thirty minutes later, I was tracing and retracing my way....and what was worse, my girls were on the raised platform with a mob who were laughing at us, lost mice in a maze.

I finally made it to the middle, and I, too, began to take pleasure in other's wrong turns.

Till a young man entered the maze.

His loping walk, his short neck, slanted eyes small ears and protruding tongue proclaimed Down Syndrome.

I thought, immediately..."This isn't a good idea."

Others on top saw him....a few made fun, but not for long....the feeling changed on top.

Sure enough, he began to struggle and panic rose in his face.

He turned wrong, and wrong again, and again....I thought he might try to break through the bushes...

Just then, a voice called out....John...John....and he pointed...this way...

It was his group leader.....

This way, John.

And John did....and the crowd on top cheered.

This way....and the crowd cheered....

He drew nearer...and when he was so near that it felt we could reach out and touch him....he turned the wrong way....and the crowd shouted....NO NO....and it confused him.....and panic set in again....

And I thought..."GO GET HIM! JUST GO GET HIM!"

No..."Quiet everybody" the leader said....

"Back this way, John."

"Yes".....now this way....."YES"....another turn and another.....and then John bounded up the steps like Rocky.

Let me tell you...the mob on top jumped up and down and cheered like he'd hit a walkoff home run to win the World Series for the Cubs....

Sometimes, you know, the curtain that divides time and eternity is pulled open, just slightly, and we can see a glimpse of what will be...and already is....God's kingdom.

Today, as we name our names somberly, lovingly, those we name are above, where they have been welcomed by joyful shouting that makes death tremble in impotence.

The joy that we will one day know is already theirs.

And they are pulling hard for us, for you and for me, as we feebly struggle, and they, in glory shine.

Till we join them in the great, eternal "our" of Our Father, may God make us faithful to the end which is but a beginning.

