

**HOW REAL IS YOUR FAITH?
RADICAL LOVE
JOHN 15:9-14
JUNE 17, 2012**

A wealthy family from Massachusetts used to take a month's vacation every summer to the coast of Maine, taking their maid with them.

The maid had an annual ritual at the beach.

She wore an old-fashioned bathing suit,
complete with a little white hat,
and carried enough paraphernalia to stock Wal-Mart.

She would settle herself on the beach,
cover every inch of her exposed flesh and journey down to the water's edge.
There she would hesitate,
taking deep breaths and working up her courage to enter the icy-cold water.

Finally, she would daintily extend one foot
and lower it slowly into the water
until she barely had her big toe submerged.

Then she repeated the act with the other foot.

Then, having satisfied her minimal urge for a swim,
she would retreat to her chair and umbrella
and spend the remainder of the vacation curled around a book.

I'm afraid that may be a picture of the level of some people's commitment to Christ.

How real is your faith?

It's one thing to show up in church and endure a worship service and sermon.

It's something else to really have faith in Jesus.

So how real is your faith?

How would you measure that?

Maybe we ought to measure by worship attendance.

How often is someone in worship?

We have some ladies who go through the attendance pads each week
and record the attendance of every family.

Then we mail out postcards

to people who have been absent three weeks in a row,
and a phone call is made to anyone missing five Sundays in a row.

We try to keep up with folks

and see if something has happened to our absentees
where we can offer help.

I've come to the conclusion we have some members who want mail.

All over the nation in all sorts of churches church attendance is down.

And it's largely because people are attending less frequently.

They're not dropping out altogether.

Instead, they think if they're here one out of three or four Sundays,
that's regular attendance.

Could we measure faith by Sunday school and Bible study attendance?

It does suggest a higher levels of interest.

How about measuring it by how much we put in the offering plate?

If you really love Jesus, you'll give to his cause, right?

Actually, Jesus also suggested the reverse order can work, too.

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Mt.6:21)

If we invest ourselves financially in his work,
we’ll care more about his work.

In other words, we will “Follow the money.”

How do you gauge if someone’s faith is real?

How about the amount of time and energy they give to serving Christ?

How much do they serve around the church?

Or serving those outside the church in the name of Jesus?

Jesus said one of the most significant measures of our relationship with him is whether we are obedient to him.

And his number one command that he wants obedience to is his command to love each other.

JOHN 15:9-14

It’s trickle down love.

The Father loves Jesus.

Jesus loves us.

And we are to love others.

And we’re Jesus’ friends IF we do as he commands, if we love others.

But not just warm feelings of love.

He says, no, he commands, that we love others as he loved us.

And how did he love us?

Sacrificially.

He loved us all the way to the cross.

He loved us so much he took all our sin onto himself.

And there on the cross he took the punishment we deserved.

He paid the penalty.

His death was not pain for the sake of pain,

but because it would bless us,

it would save us.

He loved so deeply that he was willing to sacrifice himself for our good.

And he says to us, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Have you ever loved in a way that you were moved to

do something costly, really costly,

because it would bless another person?

Sometimes love shows up in huge acts of heroism.

We’ve heard true stories of soldiers who threw themselves on a live grenade to protect their buddies.

It’s big, it’s sacrificial, it’s real,

but it’s nothing you or I are likely to face.

But what about the couple who begged a pregnant girl to not abort her baby?

They believed abortion was wrong,

that the child created in the image of God deserved to live.

They didn’t want her to make an awful mistake.

But she was afraid, panicky,

and she knew she wasn’t up to raising a child.

Finally, they begged her to let her baby live,

and then let them adopt her baby.

They hadn’t planned on that.

They were happy with their life as it was.

Their finances worked fine for just the two of them,

but would be stretched by a baby.

But there was another life to consider.

So they made the sacrifice for the sake of that little life.

It's the sacrifice every mom and dad make when they decide to have a child,
but that couple did it to adopt a child they had not planned on.

Think of Jesus on the cross, sacrificing his life so we might have life.

Sometimes love shows itself in big, dramatic ways.

But even more often, love shows itself in the little things.

Think of the characteristics of love named in 1 Corinthians 13.

"Love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy.

It does not boast, it is not proud.

Love is not rude.

It is not self-seeking.

Love is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love rejoices in the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails."

(1Cor.13:4-8a)

Those things don't sound very heroic.

In fact, they sound pretty ordinary.

But they sound a lot like Jesus.

You could write a checklist of those characteristics and post it on your refrigerator.

And whenever you see it ask yourself, "How am I doing?"

Love can be as simple as holding open the door for the person coming behind you.

It's letting in the car that needs into your lane.

It can be giving a word of encouragement to the clerk at the checkout counter.

You watched them have to deal with a customer who was a real pain.

And when you get to the register

you express sympathy and tell them what a good job they did.

Watch the look on their face when you do it.

Love is in your home life,

how you treat spouse, your kids, your parents.

Are you patient with them?

Do you speak kindly to them?

Do you offer help with the chores you think are not yours to do?

Are you forgiving,

or do you hang onto what they did day before yesterday that ticked you off?

I remember my dad making it to band concerts for my, my sister, and my brother.

Helping make sure we did our homework.

Taking me deer hunting with him, when I was too small to hold a rifle.

He probably would have been more successful in his hunts without me,
but he wanted me with him.

Love is rolling up sleeves and serving to the benefit of others.

It might be found in the volunteers giving up vacation time

to serve children in Vacation Bible Camp,

or the folks who give a Saturday morning to the Texas Ramp Project.

It shows up when you know we've been praying for someone being treated for cancer.

And you don't ask me how so and so is doing,

but call them yourself and go visit with them, pray with them.

Love is when a coworker is going through a tough time in their personal life,

and you offer a listening ear, and pray with them and for them.
 One of our members makes regular visits to a couple of homebound friends.
 She keeps them up to date with what's going on around here.
 She even takes out a copy of my sermons and Bible studies
 and they go through them together.

Here's a radical idea:

We can show love for others right here at church on Sunday mornings.
 Parking a little further from the front door and walking a bit,
 so someone else won't have to.
 Breaking away from our buddies
 to strike up conversation in the foyer with the person who apparently doesn't know anyone else.
 Scooting off the aisle and into the middle of the pew
 and inviting in the person who is trying to find a seat.
 Love notices when someone has been absent
 and makes a phone call to see how they are doing.
 Love sacrifices the intimacy of a long-time Sunday school class
 where it's hard for a new person to break in because the relationships are SO tight,
 mixing and mingling a bit
 so those relationships might loosen up a bit
 and the new person can find a place where they can plug in.
 It's a small act of love
 to sacrifice some of what *I want*,
 so another person might have some of what *they need*.

Simply stated, love means living as if it's not all about me.

My comfort, my tastes, my likes and dislikes, are not the determining factor.

Where there is love, it's about the well-being of another person.

Love asks: How can I bless them?

Even if it might cost me something,

how can I bless them?

And then love DOES it.

Why would someone love that way?

Because Jesus first loved us, and he loved us sacrificially.

And he called us to follow him... to love the same way he did.

The movie *To End All Wars* is based on a true story of some Allied POW's during World War II.

They endured incredibly harsh treatment from their Japanese captors,

while being forced to build a railroad through the Burmese jungle.

In the clip we're about to see,

one of the men was caught trying to escape,

and so now faces execution... by beheading.

WINGCLIPS: To End All Wars, You Are Free, 4:15

(As the attempted escapee is about to be executed, another soldier offers to take his place, and is crucified. All the soldiers and even the Japanese commander are affected by his sacrificial love.)

What would motivate a soldier to give up his own life so another man could live?

Only love.

And do you think the soldier who was saved lived differently

because of the sacrifice made for him?

Jesus gave his life for you and me.

The same Jesus who said, "If you love me, you'll do what I ask."

And what did he ask?

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

He was not talking about warm feelings and good intentions.

He was talking about sacrificial love, radical love.

That’s his call to you and me.

Do you live differently because of the sacrifice he made for you?

Do you love others as he loved you, with a radical, selfless love?

If that is the measure of our relationship with him, as Jesus suggests,
how real is your faith?