

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, May 12, 2024
"What's Love Got to Do With It?"

Young at Heart Message

In preparation for today's sermon, I was doing some research about love stories.

I came across a list of the greatest love stories in literature.

Can you guess what stories were on that list?

The number one love story of all time was Romeo and Juliet. No shocker there.



Next up? Pride and Prejudice.



Then, Wuthering Heights, Gone with the Wind, Jane Eyre, and Sense and Sensibility.



The Lord of the Rings made the list, believe it or not, for the love story between the elf, Arwen, and Aragorn.



Then I found a list of “real life” love stories, which included mostly people from a loong time ago. But, Johnny Cash and June Carter made the list!



My dad would be thrilled that Johnny Cash made it into one of my sermons!

Do you notice anything about all of these pictures?

They pretty much all look the same, don't they?

Lots of staring longingly into one another's eyes with these deep, passionate looks about them.

I'm guessing in most real-life love stories, those looks are few and far between!

In all of my research (which, admittedly, was not that deep and I didn't find any academic studies about the best love stories of all time), not one mentioned love stories in the Bible.

Perhaps this is because when we think of love stories, we think of popular love stories – mostly, fictional love stories.

Often, people long for their own love story.

And the stories we read in books or watch in movies are not realistic love stories. They are stories in which people fall in love, and then live happily ever after.

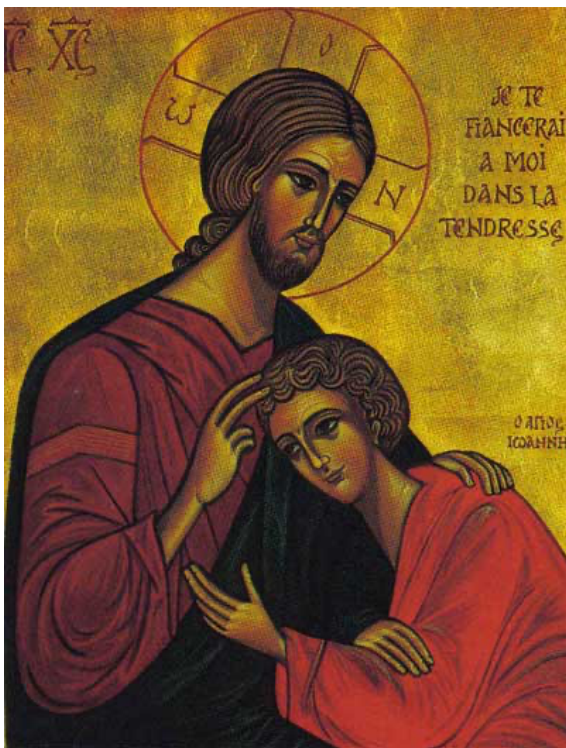
They forget to include the parts where the characters get annoyed with each other because one of them didn't fold the towels properly, or because someone left the gas tank on empty and the other one is late for work.

They don't think about all of the little stressors that come with actual relationships that can make real life feel more like a "tolerate each other" story versus an actual love story!

So, when we heard today's scripture reading, I am guessing that "love story" wasn't the first thing that came to mind!

And yet, that's essentially what's happening here. We are meeting Jesus in the middle of a love story.

The Message



In the Gospel of John, Chapter 13, verse 23, it says "One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining on his bosom."

The narrator repeats this again a couple verses later.

In fact, throughout John 13-17, we hear an epic story gushing with love.

It begins when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples.

He says “I have loved you” three times over the course of chapter 13 and 15 – he says it in 13:23, 15:9, and 15:21).

He pours his heart out to his disciples on his last evening on earth, and this is where we see the disciple whom Jesus loved resting on his chest.

In today’s passage, we hear a tone of desperation as Jesus turns toward God and prays for his friends.

This particular passage almost sounds like a plea of desperation from Jesus as he begins to mourn the loss of his beloved friends as he prepares himself to leave them.

The prayer sounds like a request for God to continue to guide the disciples, but it’s as much a plea for Jesus’ own comfort throughout his preparation.

It reminds me of two different people I have known recently who have lost battles with cancer.

In both cases, the women fought long and hard, but ended up realizing they could not fight anymore.

And, in both cases, the women celebrated their lives before they passed with their friends and family.

And I wonder if they felt a bit like Jesus in this passage – a bit of panic as they realized they would be leaving behind the people they loved the most.

At our final Going Deeper study group this past Monday, we had a discussion about love.

How do we “love” people who have harmed us? How do we “love” people who have been very terrible people in their lifetime?

It’s hard to envision loving most people in the way that love is portrayed in the “greatest love stories of all time” that I mentioned earlier.

Very often in true love stories, there is an element of self-sacrifice on one or both people’s parts.

There are love stories that portray people who rather despise each other at first, but as they get to know each other and spend time together, they begin to experience love for one another in ways they never thought possible.

So what *does* love have to do with it? And, does love always look like passionate, emotional love like in *Romeo and Juliet* or *Gone with the Wind*?

Of course not. Love can be quite complex, and can go well beyond the emotional love we tend to think of when we talk about love.

The best example of this type of love I can come up with from my own life is this:

When I owned my business, I had a neighbour who caused all kinds of problems for me.

Mostly, he would complain about noise because of dogs barking.

He complained so much that I had to get a decibel meter set up and actually record the frequency and level of noise we were producing.

Loving my neighbour in the sense we typically think about love was not really possible for me, because I barely liked the guy, let alone loved him.

But, when a storm came through and blew his stuff all over our yards and the fields behind us, did I stand and laugh and tell him he deserved it?

Well, maybe in my head I did a little bit.

But then, I got out there and I helped him clean it all up.

And I think that *this* is the kind of love Jesus was trying to get at.

It's not an emotion. It's an action. This kind of love is different than what we typically think of, and it allows us to care for people, find compassion and kindness, but still hold them at arms length. It doesn't require liking someone at all, if that's too much to muster.

This love story is one of longing and of hope. We experience Jesus longing for this type of agape love, not just for himself, but for the world.

Jesus' love proclaims the truth of the gospel and the truth about us: that we are the beloved of God, and through the examples Jesus provided us, we can know how to love deeper than what we've seen through books, TV, or movies.

This deepness, this richness of relationship requires a deeper intimacy than any real or fictional love story one could imagine.

It requires that we step out of our comfort zones, recognize people for the flawed humans that they are, and get to know them in ways that humanize them.

This helps us to better understand humanity, even if we don't always agree with others.

When we bring another person's humanity to the forefront of our minds, we can allow ourselves to love them, even if we might not particularly always like them.

This call to love others is what Jesus spends 5 chapters in the Gospel of John trying to convey to us.

It's not about passionate, emotional love.

It's about a deeper understanding and joy in humanity.

So, may we celebrate this love story as the greatest love story of all time - one that extends over two thousand years and meets us in this time and this place so we can continue to share it with others. Amen!

Let us pray:

God of compassion, we come before you with gratitude and humility as we recognize that our human understanding of love is not always on par with your understanding of love. We pray that you would help us to learn to love others in the way Jesus showed us how to love. We know it is not always easy, and we know our human emotions can sometimes get in the way of the love we know you want us to demonstrate.

God, we pray that you would help us to better understand and behave in ways that are loving toward everyone we meet, even if we do not understand them. We also pray that we continue to see your example of love demonstrated throughout the scriptures to use a model as we interact with others.

May your endless wisdom guide us today and every day. In your holy name we pray, Amen.