

THE MESSAGE for Jan 30, 2011**Ephesians 3:14-19***Loved***The Rev Dr. R. K. Miller**

Do you believe it?

Bill and Betty were married for 50 some years. They were sitting at the table eating breakfast in silence, as they had done so many times before. Betty had fixed dippy eggs and bacon and toast - just the way Bill liked them. The eggs were not too hard and not too dippy. The bacon was crisp not floppy. The toast was slathered with buttered – real butter. Betty sat there watching him and wondered. She finally broke the silence, by saying, “Bill, tell me, after all these years, do you still love me?” She continued. “You never say you love me, Bill. Tell me, do you, after all these years, still love me?” He dropped his toast onto the plate, looked at her from across the table and said. “Honey, I told you the day we got married that I love you. If I change my mind, I’ll let you know.”

Do you believe it?

Morning is my favorite time of the day. That’s when I have my coffee with God in prayer and Bible study for an hour or so. Maybe it’s my age, or maybe it’s where I am in my faith journey, or maybe it’s because of what is happening in my life, I don’t know. But I do know this, my day is not complete without that time with God in the morning. It sets my attitude for the day. It puts me on the right path spiritually.

My devotional time in the morning is always interrupted in a loving way, when one of our children gets up. One of them will stagger out of the bedroom, wander over to me, climb up into my lap, and we cuddle for awhile. Its love-time with my children in the morning. It’s during that love time I usually kiss my son or daughter on the head and whisper into his or her ear, “I love you.”

Do you believe it?

Today we begin a new worship series on relationships as we study the petition in the Lord’s Prayer, “forgive us our sins (trespasses).” Healthy relationships are based and built on love. With love there is always forgiveness. The Bible tells story after story about God’s love at work to strengthen and sustain our relationships: with God, with each another, with ourselves, and with all creation.

Here are Jesus’ cliff notes of the Bible: love God, love others.

Our greatest joys and our deepest pains are a result of our relationships. God is at work right here and right now, seeking to strengthen and to restore our relationships. That’s because you are loved.

You are unconditionally, absolutely, fully, completely, outrageously, totally, unendingly loved by God. That's what the Bible says. That's what Jesus came to show us and share with us. God loves you beyond measure. God's deepest desire is to be in a loving relationship with you. God's love for you is so deep and so wide that God will stop at nothing to be in a loving relationship with you.

Do you believe it?

We were at the Farm Show in Harrisburg earlier this month. We love to go as a family. We were having a great time as we do every year. Until, we had a moment. One of our children wandered off. We were standing there looking at a tractor used for tractor pulls. We looked around but didn't see her anywhere. "I thought she was with you..." "No. I thought she was with you..." There were people everywhere. We looked around but she was nowhere to be found. We started to panic. "Where is she?" "I don't know." Then I remembered that earlier we had talked about checking out one of the sheds converted into a cabin called, "Grandma's Cabin." So I was in hot pursuit. There she was in Grandma's Cabin.

It was one of those parental moments when I wanted to both hug her and shake the sh.....stuff right out of her. I can remember the intense feelings of that moment. If you've had the privilege of being a parent you probably had those moments and feelings too.

So often we are children just like that. So often we wander off from God. We don't mean any harm. We just sort of wander off from God and God's ways – in pursuit of our own whims and desires. Don't we? And when we do God comes looking for us, pursuing us, wherever we are because God so passionately loves us.

Do you believe it?

God's love is not conditional. It does not depend on believing the right thing, or doing the right thing. None of us gets it right anyway. At our best - God loves us. At our worst - God loves us. Perhaps the biggest challenge is for us to believe that God loves us as much as the cross says so.

That's what Paul seems to be saying in our reading from Ephesians for today. The disciples in Ephesus were struggling to love one another. The church had both Jews and Gentiles, the new and the old, people who had spent generations learning how to hate and avoid one another. Now they were to live together in community. They were enemies but now they are brothers and sisters in Christ. They moved away from a culture that encouraged them to hate one another into a culture that promoted they love one another.

These Christians struggled to believe that they were loved by God. And they struggled to love one another. Listen to what Paul tells them (*Read Ephesians 3:14-19*).

For Paul it's all about God's love. For Paul once you've experienced God's love, it changes everything. It enables us, it empowers us, it equips us to be loving people.

Do you believe it?

In her book titled *Peoplemaking*, psychologist Dr. Virginia Satir tells about growing up on a Wisconsin farm. On the back porch of the farm house there was a big round black iron pot that stood on three little legs. Her mother made her own soap, and so for part of the year the pot was filled with soap. At other times it was used to store manure for her mother's flower beds. And at other times of the year the pot was empty.

Whenever anyone wanted to use the pot, they faced two basic questions: what's in the pot now, and how full is it?

Dr. Satir writes, "Long afterwards, when people told me about themselves, whether they felt full, empty, dirty, or even 'cracked,' I thought of that old pot. One day many years ago, a family was sitting in my office struggling to find words to tell each other how they felt about themselves. I remembered the black pot and told them the story. Soon the members of the family were talking about their individual 'pots,' whether they contained feelings of worth, or guilt, or uselessness. They told me later how helpful this metaphor was to them."

So let me ask you, what's in your pot, and how full is it?

Maybe you are blessed and life is good right now. Most days the pot of your life is filled with love from family and friends. You have a healthy sense of yourself, your purpose, and your self-worth. If that's you, give thanks to Jesus! "Thank you, Jesus!"

Maybe your life isn't so blessed right now and the pot of your life is filled with guilt or shame. You've done things or said things you shouldn't have, or you failed to do or say things you should have. You see a trail of brokenness behind you, and you feel pretty broken inside.

Maybe the pot of your life is filled with pain or anger. You've been wronged, burned, or abandoned. Someone has violated you in a bad way. Maybe you're just plain angry with the sh.....stuff that life is throwing at you right now.

Or maybe the pot of your life feels empty – there's nothing. Your hopes and dreams have leaked out like sand through your finger tips. Life hasn't turned out the way you thought it would, and you're seriously wondering if it's worth the fight any more.

No matter what's in your pot, no matter how full or empty it is, I want to whisper something into your ear here today – it is the good news of Christ Jesus. And it's this... You are loved, loved beyond measure, loved beyond reason, loved beyond imagination, loved beyond comprehension. Not because you're good, but because God is.

No matter where your life's journey takes you from this day forward, God will pursue you with a passionate love like no other. God longs for you to experience how deep and how wide God's love is for you everyday. So... no matter what life has led you to believe, believe this. You have never been unloved. You have never been unloved.

Check out this video to see what I mean...

[http://www.ignitermedia.com/mini-movies/8/Never-Been-Unloved.](http://www.ignitermedia.com/mini-movies/8/Never-Been-Unloved)

Do you believe it? Amen.

Let us pray. Lord, help us to believe that we have never been and never will be unloved. Amen.