

Happy Valentine's Day! God loves you...each and every one of you. In 270 AD, a young man named Valentine was martyred because of his love for God and his faith in Jesus Christ. This day that celebrates love eventually brings us back to the very source of love...God. The love of God created us, the love of God redeemed us, the love of God compels us - to love in the same way. Ephesians 5:1-2 says **"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us..."** As we consider what God is calling HPC to focus on this year, it always comes back to God's love. Love connects us to God and to one another. Love nurtures us to become who God created us to be. Love compels us to care for and serve others.

Who does Jesus love?

JESUS LOVES THE WORLD. Jesus created it and Jesus came to die for it. John 3:16 declares **"God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son."** I love that little word "so," because it adds that little extra. We can say, "I love you" but when we say "I so love you," that adds a whole new dimension. God doesn't just love the world. God so loves the world. God loves the world enough to die for it...that is Compassion. Sympathy is when you see somebody hurting and you say, "I'm sorry you hurt". Empathy is saying, "I hurt with you. I enter into your hurt." Compassion is saying, "I'll do anything I can to stop your hurt, even if it means taking your place." Matthew 9:36 says **"When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."** Jesus didn't just send a Hallmark card...Jesus took action to deal with the helplessness of this world; that is the way God wants us to be towards His world. If you are going to have the blessing of God on your life and you want to be like Jesus Christ, you have to learn to love the people Jesus made - and died for...that is the whole world.

Who does Jesus love?

JESUS LOVES THE CHURCH. The church is Jesus' body and Jesus loves his body. The church is Jesus' bride and Jesus loves his bride. The church is Jesus' flock and Jesus loves his flock. The church is God's family and Jesus loves his family. The reason everything exists is God wanted a family. There would be no universe, no earth, no human race...except that God made it all to create people to love...that people is called the church. Ephesians 5:25 says **"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."** How much does Jesus love the church? Look at the cross. With his arms outstretched, Jesus is saying, "I love my church this much." Because Jesus loved, Jesus served...and Jesus sends us into God's world and God's church...to love and to serve.

HPC is strong in this area. We have the largest prayer chain that I know of. We provide the largest number of volunteers at the homeless Shelter at Orenco Station. Our members are involved in more mission endeavors than you would believe. We tithe our income as a church to missions and almost double that with special offerings. And within our church family, most of our people serve regularly in some way - giving their time and energy to be on a ministry team of some sort - be it music or teaching or the kitchen or a co-mission or Tuesday's Treasures or visiting shut ins or caring for those dealing with debilitating diseases or driving our youth to events or what have you. We are strong, but we can be better. And we need to be reminded of how - and why we serve.

Seek reconciliation

Jesus helped people get right with God and right with each other. This IS the good news! God has dealt with all that separates us from God and each other. God builds a bridge to you through Christ then you build that bridge to other people. It is called reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 says **"God reconciled us to Himself in Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...and God has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us."** We make our peace with God, then we make our peace with others...and finally, in service to God, we help those we love be reconciled to the God who loves them...from being the world God so loves to being God's people. We serve as Christ's ambassadors.

Everyone ministers

Jesus sent all of his disciples into ministry and Jesus said **"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."** (John 20:21). Ministry is not optional for Christians...it is part of what it means to be a Christian. In the reformed church it is called the "priesthood of all believers". You serve where God has planted you. You have a sphere of influence that no one else can reach. As you serve and love on the people around you, they see that Christ is real...and they will want to know the Jesus you know and love and serve. We serve because Jesus tells us to...and shows us how.

Reach out to those less fortunate

Jesus laid out his sense of call with these words (Luke 4:18) **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."** God loves the poor. The poor in spirit. The poor in possessions. The poor. God hears the cries of those in need and sends those who have to meet those needs. Jesus said, **"whatever you did for the one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."** (Matthew 25:40) We serve as those who have all been blessed to bless. We serve with grateful hearts...and willing spirits.

Value the whole person

Jesus cared for whole people. Matthew 9:35 says **"Jesus went through all the villages teaching...preaching...and healing."** One third of his ministry was preaching - declaring the good news. One third of his ministry was teaching - explaining the good news. And one third of his ministry was health care - showing the good news. In the same way, Christianity is a preaching, teaching, healing faith. Jesus cares about the mind (education), body (health care), and the spirit (salvation)...body, mind and spirit...we do too. We serve seeing people through God's eyes...and an openness to God's Spirit working through us to meet real needs.

Energy, intelligence, imagination, and love

"Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?" This is an ordination question asked of all pastors, elders, and deacons...but it should be posed to every Christian. We were anointed for ministry at our baptism. We are empowered for ministry through God's indwelling Spirit. The question is: Will we give God our best? To do nothing is to give God our worst. To do something...is a start, but hardly the example of Jesus...or what we are capable of. Our life's purpose - and our life's joy - comes through serving others. Give God your best.