

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
October 23, 2016**

1 John 2:15-17

Letting Go of Love

Hymns: 378 – 384 - 321

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

A few years ago there was a 99-year old man from Italy named Antonio. Antonio was a married man - married to a 96-year old woman named Rosa. Together they had a wonderful family – five children, 12 grandchildren, and one great grand-child. Seventy-seven years of love and marriage. It seemed that the only thing that would part Antonio from his dear Rosa was death itself. What a life that Antonio and his wife had.

That was...until Antonio stumbled across some love letters that Rosa had written years prior, a hidden keepsake of a past relationship with another man. Antonio was crushed. But not for the exact reason you might think. You see, Antonio had known about this man in his wife's past. And together, Antonio and Rosa had moved on with forgiveness given.

But the letters were a jolt to Antonio's heart. Why would Rosa have stayed in contact? Why would she have kept the letters all these years later. Imagine Antonio's pains as he discovered

that the only woman he had loved had continued to give room in her heart to another man. And so after 77 years of marriage, Antonio filed for divorce making them the world's oldest divorcees. He was heartbroken. She was heartbroken. Their life was torn apart.

As Christians, we are in a special relationship with God. In fact, one of the most oft-used ways in the Bible of describing that relationship is marriage. You and I and every Christian in the Church are called the Bride of Christ! And that has a few tremendous implications for our lives which we are going to explore today.

Every person born into this world is, in effect, born into a bad relationship. We have a first love, but this lover is absolutely no good for us. Every person's first love is the world and everything in the world. (Now let's take a moment to make sure we are all clear in what sense John is using that term *world*. *World* can obviously mean our planet, it can also refer broadly to the people on this planet. And *world*, in both of those senses, is a good thing and we are even called to love our planet and its people. *World*, though in the Bible, can also refer to the human desires that are opposite of the values of heaven.) It is that *world*, with its desires in opposition to God, that is our first love.

And that love has some terrible effects in our lives. John tells us that love of the world is characterized by cravings, lusts, and boasting. There are a million different ways in which this sinful world works to capture our attention and even gain our love. And this first love, despite the ugliness it brings into our lives, is clung to by a sinful nature inside of each of us that is naturally drawn to much of what the world has to offer. A love affair with the world, despite seeming to be full of pleasure and fun and success, is eternally destructive for each of us.

So, Jesus comes into our lives and he rescues us from the bad relationship that we are stuck in. He breaks that tie that we have with the world; the connection that we couldn't sever on our own. He calls us to be his own, tells us that he loves us dearly, and makes a promise of faithfulness to us. He chooses us to be his bride.

So, Christ rescues us from this relationship we have with the world, but there is a problem. The problem for every one of us is that each of us comes into this relationship with Jesus with a whole lot of baggage – the guilt and shame that is the leftovers of that former ugly relationship with the world. Guilt and shame that has the potential to cause continued problems, both in our lives and in our relationship with God.

But what Jesus does as he calls us to be his bride is that he also removes all the guilt and ugliness that is left as the result of our relationship with the world. Through the work that he did on the cross, he has taken every reason for guilt and shame away. And he has promised that when he forgives, he will never bring that sin up again, he will never use it against us, he will never burden us with its guilt. Not only are we Christ's rescued bride who have been given a new relationship, we are also Christ's redeemed bride, who have been given forgiveness. And having been rescued and redeemed, Jesus calls us to live as his bride, dedicated solely to him who has loved us in the most remarkable of ways.

Based upon all of that which we have talked about so far, why would we not live in that way? What a life it is that we have as Christians – the beloved bride of Christ, able to live daily in joy and peace, with nothing to weigh us down from the past and nothing that can threaten us in the future. Our lives have purpose and our futures are secure – all because of Jesus and what he has done for us his bride. Who of us would ever be anything but a faithful bride to our faithful Savior Jesus?

However... there are "love letters." There are "love letters" that every single one of us are holding onto in our hearts and in our lives. And they aren't evidence of a relationship with Jesus. These "love letters" that we hide in our hearts are an attachment to the past. They show hearts that can't fully let go of the pleasure that the world has to offer and which our sinful nature enjoys so much.

And even worse, these "love letters" of our heart provide evidence of an ongoing affair that each of us maintains with the world.

- They show us continuing to go after the cravings of our sinful hearts in so many ways.
- They shine a light on hearts giving into sinful and shameful lusts.
- They expose unfaithful Christians boasting with pride and being fueled by worldly accolades and accomplishments.

Imagine how Christ feels when he looks into our hearts and he finds those "love letters" to the world? After doing all of his work to rescue and redeem so that we might be his eternal bride, what does Christ get in return? He gets brides who can't let go of their previous pursuits; who keep returning to fleeting pleasure; who maintain an illicit relationship with the world. Why do we hold on to this world and its cravings, lusts, and boasts? Why do we continually return to this disastrous affair? We are an unworthy and unfaithful bride.

The "love letters" of our hearts and the relationship that we hold onto with this sin-filled world are worthy of divorce. And who could blame God, if after all that he has done, decided that enough is enough when it comes to our unfaithful hearts. God could, he should, sever us from himself forever.

But God would not have it that way. Instead, every time we are caught with those "letters" of attachment to the world; every time we run off towards the pleasures of the world; every time we return to our perfect God in the shame and guilt of our unfaithfulness expecting God to finally send us away; we find God's love and forgiveness. And that is because the love that moved God to make us his bride is unfailing. That is because the forgiveness that is the foundation for our union with God is forever. Our God, who loves us, who rescues us, who redeems us, who calls us to be his own, is forever faithful!

And the question for each of you to go home thinking about today is this: How will you live as that forgiven bride? The "love letters" of invitation will always come from the world, begging for us to hold onto them and even answer them. Will you maintain that relationship; or will you set your heart solely on Christ

and his ways and his desires for you? Listen once more to the encouragement God gives you in his Word, **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever”** (1 Jn 2:15–17). You are the bride of Christ, rescued, redeemed, called to live forever. Amen.