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A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER Michael B. Beough
John 15:12-13 March 21, 2008
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Why Jesus? For me it has to do with the incomprehensible love of Jesus for us. Incomprehensible because I do not deserve his love. The place where I see that love most clearly demonstrated is on the day that we call Good Friday.

In almost every way, measured in human terms, this Friday 2000 years ago was anything but good. It was violent. Vicious people calling for blood. A government executing an innocent man.

The only sense in which it was "good" is what Jesus achieved for us that day. For the love of us, he laid down his life to atone for our sins.

ATONEMENT

The word "atone" means to become "at one" with someone else. It signifies that something has been done to remove the barrier that has been erected between two people because of a sin. If I have injured you, perhaps I can atone by paying you or by giving up something for you. This payment gets me back in your good graces. That is, if you accept my payment and forgive me. Then I have won atonement. We are as one again.

Well, what the Bible says is that there is nothing we can do to atone for our sins against God. We can't remove the barrier that our sins have built up between ourselves and God. In fact, sin is so much a part of us, has such control over us – *for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23* - that even when we try to atone, to make amends with God, we just keep adding to the problem. This sin barrier is what keeps us from experiencing the joy and blessings God has in store for us. It prevents a living relationship with God. *The wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23*. This is the human condition. There is no escaping it. We can't blow up the barrier. We can't go around it. We can't get over it. Without some outside help, we are stuck for all eternity behind the wall of death.

We talk about having a purpose in life. Jesus had a purpose in life. He came to do something to change this impossible condition of the human heart. On Good Friday, he gave his life as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world. He came to be a sacrificial lamb.

We may not get the connection, but sacrificing animals to atone for sins was a part of the Jewish religious system. It goes all the way back into the Old Testament and the laws in the book of Leviticus. In Jesus' day, people were still required to bring animals and birds to the temple for sacrifice.

THE ATONING DEATH OF JESUS

Now, Jesus gives his life to accomplish what all the other sacrifices could never achieve. What no other person could ever achieve. It is true that people give their lives to save others. Soldiers. Maybe a parent to save a child. But no one could accomplish what he did because Jesus wasn't just a man like other men who have given their lives to save someone else from danger or death. The incomprehensibility of it all is that Jesus was God Himself on the cross. God is so in love with us that God gave His own life as payment for our sins against him. On Good Friday, God took down the barrier. God smashed it. Debt paid in full. You owe nothing for your sins. In the cross, God declares you are forgiven, you are forgiven, you are forgiven!

I tried explaining this to a Jewish family several years ago. They kept saying that we have to pay for our sins. No one can pay for them for us. It is only by doing good works that we get God to bless us. A home free card from God was out of the question for them.

They helped me see just how radical Jesus' death was. How deep the love of God to take upon Himself what we deserve! How Jesus came with a love like no other we have ever seen. We are now free. We have been reconciled with God so that all the blessings God intends for us are available. God has broken the spell of sin over us. The Bible uses words like redeemed, ransomed, saved from an eternal death.

ACCESS TO THE FATHER

Through Jesus "we have access to the Father." And access to the peace, purpose, and promise that we all yearn for and sometimes dream about. The power of that reality impacts our lives through faith. Delivered from tyranny of self; conscience cleansed; new moral power given. To love as he has loved us.

Jesus gave his life because he believed it would make a difference for everybody, until the end of time. And we must ask the question, Does it make any difference today? That was so long ago. What about today in a world so far from the world of Jesus, where for many God might as well not exist, where so many believe that we only have to think harder to solve all our problems, where so many seem to believe in God but still don't reflect it in their choices and decisions? Does his death really matter all that much?

I wouldn't be here if it didn't matter. I wouldn't be here if it didn't somehow make a difference in my life. If I didn't somehow believe that in the cross a new power is unleashed, a new door opened, a new light shining in the darkness. And that light is the love of Jesus that burns in my heart. A Good Friday love. A love like no other. To make me more loving. To love as he loved me. To make a difference in the world.

Jesus said it himself. In John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Tonight, we see Jesus on the cross. How our hearts burn with his love!