

**Sermon: "For The Love Of It!"**  
**Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40**  
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**Reynoldsburg United Methodist Church**  
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There was a guy who weighed about 300 pounds, and he was sitting at home alone one day thinking, "I've got to do something different with my life. Things aren't going like I want it to go, and my life just seems empty and void. I'm not sure really what to do here. I know, I'm going to call my pastor and see if he can help me." So he scheduled an appointment with his pastor. He showed up on the day and sat down, and the pastor looked at him and said, "What can I do for you?" He said, "Well, Pastor, I'm overweight—have been my whole life—and as you might imagine, that kind of puts a damper on my dating life. I would really like to get married and have a family. I've tried everything I know to do, but nothing seems to work; and I thought maybe you could help me. I thought maybe you would have some advice for me."

The pastor thought for a moment and said, "I'll tell you what—you just be ready tomorrow morning at 8:00 AM. I think I have an idea, and I think I can help you." The guy was kind of puzzled by that and said, "Well, you know what, Pastor? I trust you. You haven't led me wrong yet, and I'll be ready at 8:00 AM." The next morning, he wakes up; and the guy is trying to figure out what's going on. 8:00 AM comes around and, sure enough, there is a knock on the door. He opens the door—still a little bit groggy from the sleep in his eyes—and here is this beautiful woman who looked like she stepped off the pages of Fitness Magazine. She looked at him and said, "Hey, your pastor told me to tell you that if you can catch me, you can have me..." and she took off running.

This happened day after day after day for the next six months, and every day he got a little bit faster, he got a little bit closer; and finally at the end of six months—after losing more than 100 pounds—he thought, "Tomorrow is my day. This is it! This is what I've been waiting for..." And so the next morning comes around, and he gets up extra early. He is putting in some extra stretching (he doesn't want to pull a hamstring along the way), and he is thinking, "I'm going to be ready!" Sure enough, at 8:00 AM, his goal is as soon as she knocks on the door, he's gone, right?

The knock on the door happens, he throws open the door—ready to take off running—and there is this 300-pound woman in a jogging suit. She looked at him and said, "My pastor told me to come see you and tell you that if I can catch you, I can have you." It is really all about motivation, right? Here's the deal—there are many of us in this room that are very intrinsically motivated. There are many of us here who sit back, and it does not take much for us to accomplish what it is that we want to accomplish. We are just naturally motivated to do those things on our own. Then there are others (probably more of you than would like to admit) that are like me who are very extrinsically motivated—that if there is a competition involved, you are there. If something or somebody is challenging you at something—if you feel like you have really got to step up to the plate—you will do it with no problems, no questions asked, you are there.

Whatever it is that motivates you, the truth is—in all of our lives—motivation plays a significant roll in the things that we accomplish. About eight months ago, I was sitting in my office preparing for a sermon series on evangelism—which is just a big 'churchy' word for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world in which

we live—as I am preparing and really reading through, trying to figure out what it is that God has for us, I came across this passage of scripture that I had grown up listening to and grown up reading my entire life. It is found in Matthew chapter twenty-eight.

For those of you that maybe grew up in church, this is considered ‘The Great Commission’ that Jesus left for his disciples just before He went back to heaven. It starts in verse sixteen of chapter twenty-eight of Matthew, and it says this: “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

Now, I read that again and thought, “Well, I’ve heard that before, I’ve read that before, there’s nothing new here—what are You trying to show me, God?” It was in the midst of re-reading that and praying a few months back that something new hit me—and it hit me like a ton of bricks—and because I have always looked at the part about going into the world and preaching the gospel and baptizing and telling everyone about Jesus, and I thought that was the heartbeat of that entire passage of Scripture. But God showed me something different that day. God showed me that the end of verse twenty—when it said “...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” You see, that word ‘commanded’ just jumped off the pages for me. That word ‘commanded’ just kind of was everything that day for some reason.

So I began to think and study and thought, “I know this word ‘command’ is in Scripture. There’s the Ten Commandment things—you know, that list of ‘don’t dos’ and ‘dos’—I know that.” There are a lot of things in there that God makes a command—to do this or don’t do this—and then I turned over to Matthew chapter twenty-two and remembered that everything that Jesus had commanded for mankind to do was wrapped up in the verses that were read for us. What He says in Matthew twenty-two is this: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength. That’s the greatest commandment, and the second is love your neighbor as yourself.” As I began to think about that as I sat in my office and began to just try to figure out what God was saying to me, this is what I received—we can never fulfill ‘The Great Commission’ until we live into ‘The Great Commandment.’ In other words, what Jesus is saying in Matthew twenty-two is, “This is the motivation for you to go do what I’ve asked you to do.” It is all about love. In other words, “When you go out there and are trying to share My message with the world, you better do it with love being your words and love being your actions and even more importantly love being your motive.”

Donald Miller, who is one of my favorite authors—he is a Christian author who wrote a book called, *Blue Like Jazz*—maybe many of you have read it. It was on the best sellers list for a long time. I heard Donald speak at a conference one day, and he said this, “No one will ever listen to you until they first know that you love them.” I was humbled by the fact that I can get up in front of people and preach on a daily basis—week in and week out. I can live my life and talk to people everywhere I go; but if they don’t know that I love them, it may mean nothing to them in the end. The good thing for us is we are not the only ones who struggle with this. In fact, this has been a problem that has plagued the church for years—all the way back to the beginning.

If you look in the book of Acts, let me give you a little background on this. Acts chapter fifteen was written about 50 AD—just a few years after Jesus had gone back to heaven. This is a few years into the ministry that the disciples had been doing—spreading the Good News, living into The Great Commission—and what we find out here in Acts chapter fifteen is this city of Antioch, where a church has been planted. It was planted by the Apostle Peter; and what we find out in chapters ten through fourteen is—because of Peter’s message and the way in which he delivered it—thousands of people had come to know Jesus. This was a growing church if there ever was one. It was thriving, it was a great community, it was a place where everybody wanted to be; and all of that came to a screeching halt in a train wreck in Acts chapter fifteen, verse one.

It says this, “Some men (don’t know who they were) came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers; unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” Translation is this: these young religious leaders from Jerusalem show up to these people who have given their hearts to Jesus—in this place where thousands of people have been coming to know Jesus as their Savior—and they said, “Hey guys, I know that you believe in God and you want to be saved; but unless you follow our rules and unless you make yourself look like us and unless you conform to being just like us, no matter how much you want to be saved, it ain’t going to happen.”

Needless to say, this caused quite an uproar—quite a problem going on in the church for these young believers. It just so happened that Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch on their way to their second missionary journey and, of course, everyone went running to Paul. “Paul, is this true? I mean, we believe in Jesus, we love Jesus, we want to live for Jesus. We’ve been meeting like this in this new church. We’ve been doing everything that we know to do, but now these guys are telling us that it doesn’t matter—unless we look like them, unless we conform to all of their rules, we can’t be saved—is this true?” Paul—in the midst of all that—decided, “Let’s go back to the leaders.” So they traveled back to Jerusalem and sat down in front of the counsel of elders, in front of these disciples, these apostles who were the young leaders. In other words, they called a board meeting.

They called a board meeting to find out whether or not these people who had been growing in Christ could even be saved. In the midst of all their testimonies and in the midst of all the arguments and in the midst of everything that had happened over the course of those days as they were meeting in front of the council, the council made a very important decision—and it is found in verse nineteen of Acts chapter fifteen. It says this: “It is our judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.” Did you catch that? “We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

I wonder what would have happened—I wonder, would we even be here today had those elders, those apostles not made that decision? What would have happened if they would have looked at them and said, “You know what? We agree with them. You don’t look like us, you don’t act like us, you can’t be saved.” And those young believers would have gone back to their town and given up on God—would the church have ever spread? Would we have ever heard the hope and the message of truth found in Jesus Christ today? I think those apostles and those leaders understood something—that is for us to remind ourselves today—and that is this point: changing people is God’s job—loving them is ours.

Changing people is what God does—our command is not to change people, it is to love them. The greatest commandment that God ever handed down to us is to love

one another—like we love God—with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind. The problem is, I think, many times we get the things confused. We think it is our job to do the changing. We think it is our responsibility to fix people. We think if we do not do that, the whole world is going to be doomed. Everything that I read—and the heartbeat of what the council's decision was in Acts fifteen—is this: we are suppose to love them. God does the dirty work.

There is a book out right now written by the gentlemen who is going to be the president of the Barna Group (following in the succession of George Barna). His name is Dave Kinnaman. About five, six, or seven years ago, Dave Kinnaman felt really burdened that God was calling him to write a book; so he called up his buddy Gabe Lyons, and between the two they began to talk about and think about what this book would look like. Over the course of the last five or six years, they have been compiling data like only the Barna Group can do—calling hundreds upon thousands of people—getting information. They polled people between the ages of sixteen and forty-two and asked them this question: "What do you think about Christians?"

Dave Kinnaman says in his book, *unchristian*, "Christianity has an image problem because Christianity is now become more known for what it opposes than what they live for." There were three answers that rose to the top in the questions they asked to these people—what do you think of Christians? Ninety-one percent of everyone they surveyed said that Christians are homophobic; 87% said Christians are judgmental; and 85% said Christians are hypocrites—those are the top three answers. More than 85% of this world we live in say, to them, "Christians don't even like us, let alone love us. They don't even want to be around us, let alone share with us the love of Christ."

I guess the question to ask ourselves is: have we become like the Pharisees? Have we become a group of people—a clique, a cluster of people—who hide behind the term 'Christian,' but who look at the world and say, "We want you to look like us and act like us and dress like us and even vote like us before you can come into our sanctuary—before we love you, we want to change you; and unless you're willing to change, no thanks—we don't want you here?" The truth of the matter is—whether you and I believe that or not, whether you and I really think that—that is the perception. The truth is based on the research—that is what the world thinks of us. The world says, "They don't like us; they don't love us, so why in the world would we ever listen to them? What do they have to offer us? If they really don't care in the first place, I'm not going to listen to them anyway."

What would happen if, the next time Dave did his poll, the next time he planned to write his next book in the next few years, he did all of his research, and you and I and all Christians around the world began to live out The Great Commandment. What would happen if when they called these same people that they called the last five years, if the answers and the responses were, "Wow! They love us! They want to make an impact a positive impact on our world! Christians live out what Jesus lived out! Christians—I want to be like them! There's something about them that I want to get to know!" What would happen to our world? How much better would we be at fulfilling The Great Commission if we began to change the perception of the world in which we live that we are trying to reach?

The problem is, there are many of us who are hung up on the fact that we need to change people, and we forget to love them. Now, don't get me wrong—listen to me very clearly when I say this—there are rules. There is right and wrong. There is absolute truth. There are standards, and God has laid them out very plainly in His

Word. There is right and wrong—make no mistake about it. We are not talking about some universal thing—“You think whatever you think...”—that is not what I am talking about. But how can we as Christians expect them to listen to our message of hope and truth if they do not think we even like them—let alone love them!

I am not talking about making it okay to live the life that they are living. I am talking about loving them enough—right where they are—so it breaks down the barrier and allows God the freedom and room to change all the dirty stuff in their lives. That is what it is about—that is why God said, “The greatest commandment—first of all—is to love Me. Get your own house in order; and then secondly, share that love with everybody else.” Six chapters later in the book of Matthew, we find out then we can go out and proclaim the message of truth of Jesus Christ to the world. The truth is: when we authentically love people—genuine love for people—that is when evangelism happens.

Authentic evangelism honestly takes place when you and I first start to love the people we are around. The Apostle Paul laid this out for us in Second Corinthians chapter five, verse fourteen: “Christ’s love compels us.” In other words, he is saying to the church of Corinth—and he is saying to us today—if you do not love people, you are not going to be motivated to do the things you are suppose to do. The Greek word for compel in that verse—the literal translation—is for us to imagine a boat going from the river into a channel, into a loch or canal. It is pressing against and forcing us to keep focused on the details—on the main important thing. In other words, Paul is saying, “Let’s boil it all down—let Christ’s love squeeze us into a place where we go; the only thing left for me to do is love people because He loves me.”

This is not about ulterior motives. It is not about us as Christians trying to mark another checkmark on the chalkboard of our evangelism committees. It is not about our attendance report. It is not about trying to get as many people in the walls of this church as we can. That is a byproduct of the commandment that God has given us as Christians. He says, “If you want to fulfill The Great Commission, then start with The Great Commandment—love people, genuinely love people.

So here are the tough questions: do we really want to love people who aren’t like us? I mean, do we genuinely want to love people who are different than we are? And if so, are we willing to do whatever it takes to reach them with the love of God? Even if that means putting aside our personal opinions and our personal views and looking past the sin that they are living in and loving them right where they are. If we are going to have any hope of ever making an impact in the world in which we live, it has to start with God changing the way we look at and love people—because when we really truly love people, it will motivate us to live out The Great Commission.