

1 Sermon, October 14, 2012

Texts: Luke 10:25-28, Colossians 3:12-17

Title: "Think Greater: Love Unconditionally"

1. Unconditional Love
2. Seeing potential
3. Seeing reality – no rose-colored glasses
4. Sacrifice
5. Forgive
6. Expect the best

1. Unconditional Love

Dateline – June 9, 2009:

Three years ago, the Hassall family of Berry, KY, received an Extreme Home Makeover. Their home at ... Berry, KY was torn down and a new one was built in seven days as the Hassall family went on vacation to Disneyworld. Now, with great regret, the Hassalls have decided to sell their home for \$349,900.

According to an interview with Andy Cunningham of WKYT, there are several reasons for selling:

"Between the mortgage payments, other home costs and our medical expenses, we just can't afford to stay there anymore," Brian Hassall said. Hassall went on to say maintaining the 3,300 square foot home and the more than five acres it sits on is too much. "We thought long and hard about our decision and it wasn't easy," said Hassall.

Another reason they'd like to move is to be closer to Cynthiana and to their medical providers in Lexington.

The Hassalls have endured a lot of heartache in the past few years. Brian is a Cynthiana police officer who was shot on duty. He continues to be afflicted with migraines from the incident. His wife, Michelle, is battling cancer as well as a rare blood disorder. The couple has two adopted children, including one with special needs.

According to this article, the Hassall's are in debt for the house, too:

...the Extreme Makeover's producers paid only their second mortgage, which they took out to pay for the adoption of their son. After the old house was torn down and the new one built, they were left with a first

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mortgage on a house still valued at \$117,000 (according to property records), much larger utilities bills and a new and larger tax bill.

... between the debt for the house and their mounting medical bills, the Hassalls had to make a very difficult decision — And, as this article points out, the Hassalls are not the first Extreme Makeover recipients to sell their home.

When Extreme Home Makeover helped the Hassal family, it may have seemed a lot like unconditional love. It's a real feelgood thing to provide something for free: a free vacation, a free "essentially new" home. (Although I'm sure there were legal contracts involved.)

It seemed pretty unconditional...
But was it *love*?

2. Seeing potential

Looking at the Luke reading, Jesus gives us an example of love in the way he treats the "expert on religious law."

Jesus took him seriously. The expert asked what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus asked the man what *he* thought.

Even if the man was trying to trap him, Jesus gave him the benefit of the doubt. He saw potential in this expert on the Law.

Often in Jesus' interactions with people he saw potential in them, and told them to have faith.

I think that's a part of love – seeing potential in the other. On Extreme Home Makeover the producers saw potential for the Hassal family. But does that make it love?

3. Seeing reality – no rose-colored glasses

Going along with seeing potential is seeing reality. If you love someone, you need to see them as they are, not just as you would like them to be.

Only with a sense of reality can you respond to their real needs.

You know the phrase "Tough Love." You love someone, but you don't let them get away with doing something destructive.

Tough love is seeing the reality of someone else's problems, but not giving up hope.

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When you love someone, it can be easy to give in to their unreasonable demands. But when you do that repeatedly, it just results in one person taking advantage of the other. It results in dependency and codependency. It's a one-side relationship of give and take — one side is always giving, and the other is always taking.

That's not the kind of unconditional love that we're talking about. Fostering dependency is not really love.

We look to Jesus story of the Good Samaritan, who gave to someone very different, not expecting anything in return. The story shows tremendous love and generosity, and neither the Samaritan nor the wounded man is being taken advantage of.

Extreme Home Makeover looked at the reality of the suffering of the Hassal family, and built them something that really felt good. But what they built didn't really meet the Hassal family's needs. Something less grand, easier to heat would have met their needs much better. Something on a smaller scale would have been more loving.

4. Sacrifice

So, unconditional love sees reality and also sees potential.
A third thing unconditional love needs is sacrifice.

Love doesn't remain aloof and uninvolved. Love gets dirty, ignores the negative remarks, and spends itself on the other.

We Christians know that. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the ultimate in unconditional love. The cross is not just an important symbol of love, it is the way God chose to show his love to us in Jesus Christ.

You can't love someone without sacrifice.

How many you parents gave up sleep for your children's sake? How many parents have gotten wet and cold or hot and burned watching a child's sports? How many parents have taken the time when they didn't have time, or gone to the school administration to fight for their child's cause? In these and countless other ways, parents sacrifice because of love.

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There was no sacrifice with extreme home makeover. The advertisers paid the bills. The producers got paid a salary. It's fun, it's touching, but there is no sacrifice.

5. Forgiveness

Another sign of unconditional love is forgiveness. If you have a relationship over time, there will be reasons to practice forgiveness. There will be irritations, broken stuff, late arrivals, uncalled-for anger – and the only solution is forgiveness.

Colossians 3:13 says: Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Often, children need to learn to forgive their parents. Parents can disappoint their children in thousands of ways. Love means learning to let it go.

6. Expect the best

The last sign of unconditional love is expecting the best.

Our new Bishop, Hee-Soo Jung, told a group yesterday that he expected the best. He said, "Don't be a frozen asset. Be an ambassador. Knock down the walls between people. We can do it together."

Paul in Colossians expects the best – "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly."

As your pastor, I have come to expect the best of you. You are a loving congregation, you want to serve God and others. In fact, you have a way of exceeding my expectations when someone has a need. You surround that person with love and you help them to become more what God wants them to be.

So, today I'm encouraging you to "Think Greater" by loving unconditionally.

That means seeing potential while being realistic. That means sacrifice and forgiveness and expecting the best.

God has given you all the tools to use to love unconditionally. Now you just have to do it.

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25 An expert in the Law of Moses stood up and asked Jesus a question to see what he would say. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to have eternal life?"

26 Jesus answered, "What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?"

27 The man replied, "The Scriptures say, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.' They also say, 'Love your neighbors as much as you love yourself.'"

28 Jesus said, "You have given the right answer. If you do this, you will have eternal life." (Luke 10:25-28 - CEV)

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' [a];(c) and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." (Luke 10:25-28 - NIV)

12 God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. 13 Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you. 14 Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together.

15 Each one of you is part of the body of Christ, and you were chosen to live together in peace. So let the peace that comes from Christ control your thoughts. And be grateful. 16 Let the message about Christ completely fill your lives, while you use all your wisdom to teach and instruct each other. With thankful hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 Whatever you say or do should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks to God the Father because of him. (Colossians 3:12-17 - CEV)