

## Outlandish Love

I John 3:1-3

San Marcos September 8, 2007

We don't use the word "outlandish" much anymore, but I chose it purposefully to be the adjective in the sermon title today, because I think it comes closest to reflecting the thought in the text we're looking at. John wrote, "Behold *what manner* of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God!"

I John 3:1. The phrase "what manner of" is from a word in the original, *potapos*, which comes from a root meaning literally "from what country?" It was used to describe something "foreign, from a different place; something that was not indigenous; something that wasn't from around here".

From that original idea, came the thought that the word meant "what kind of" in a positive sense. Usually when you say "what kind of", you might think that phrase would be used to ask a question "What kind of car do you drive?" Or, "What kind of flour is in that recipe?" But that's not the case here. Here it means "what kind of" in an exclamatory sense. So it came to mean something "out of the ordinary, something great or magnificent, and something uncommonly good." It could also mean something "extravagant or wonderful", something said in amazement.

- Matthew 8:27 After the great calm on Galilee when Jesus quieted the sea, the disciples exclaimed "**What kind of** Man can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"
- II Peter 3:11 "Therefore since all these things will be dissolved, **what manner** of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness."

This also is the background of our English word "outlandish." When you look at it, you can see that it has the seed of "something foreign" in it. "Out-land-ish." That's because in Old English, it originally meant "something not from this land, something from another place." If you have a King James Bible, you will find this word in Nehemiah 13:26, speaking of King Solomon who was led into idolatry by foreign wives: "him did *outlandish* women cause to sin."

To describe God's love, John uses a word that originally meant "foreign or outlandish" but which came to be "extraordinary," "of what quality or kind." I believe *both* concepts are useful in understanding this amazing love! It is "out of this world" in origin, "foreign" to our understanding and "outlandish" in its extravagance. And, it is

"extraordinary, like no other." So it's true that the phrase "what kind of" can be used in a way that might anticipate a question mark, actually it demands an exclamation point! "What kind of love the Father has bestowed on us!"

John struggled with words to try to describe this love, just as he struggled with words to try to describe the city God has prepared for His children. How do you compare something that is incomparable? If I'm trying to describe to you a Nissan Xterra, I might say, "It's like a Toyota 4Runner, or a Ford Escape." But what if I'm trying to describe something that's not like anything I've ever seen?

One day Elisha saw his mentor Elijah swept to heaven in a vehicle like nothing he had ever witnessed. A "chariot of fire" was the only thing he could come up with. One day soon when we see Jesus in the sky we'll sympathize with Elisha's attempt to describe heavenly things with earthly words. One day soon we'll stand before God's throne and say, "Yes, I guess I can see why John said it was like a sea of glass," but we'll understand his frustration in trying to compare the celestial with the worldly. How do you compare God's outlandish love with anything on this earth?

I hold in my hand here something quite small. At first glance you might think it's a bic cigarette lighter, but it's not. Probably 5 years ago no one would know what this is, but I'm guessing that today many of you will recognize this as a "travel drive," or "flash stick." That is, a portable storage device for computer information. Try to imagine attempting to describe what this, and what this does, to someone deep in the heart of Australia or some other place where technology hasn't yet penetrated, where they've never seen an electric light, much less a computer. Or, try to imagine explaining to someone who lived a while back, like Abraham Lincoln what a "travel drive" is! Where would you start? It's hard to describe something when there is nothing to compare it to.

That's the way it is with God's incomparable love. Because there were really no words that could come close to the "out of this world, foreign, outlandish" love that God has shown to us, the apostle simply invites us to look. "*Behold*, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us," he writes. Sometimes a look is all it takes.

- In the wilderness experience when numerous poisonous snakes plagued the Israelites, how could they be healed? Was there some kind of anti-venom they could take? No, they were invited to "look" on a bronze snake made by Moses, weren't they? There

may have been some who wanted to question how this could remedy their pain, but for those who obeyed and looked, healing was theirs. Let's say you were alive back then, and your friend had been bitten by a poisonous snake. He's writhing in pain; it might cost him his life. But you go to him and say, "I know the answer! I know how you can get help! I know how you can be healed! What you need to do is just *look* on a metal snake that Moses made, and you'll get well!" Do you know what's sad about that? I wonder how many died in their agony because they wouldn't believe that the remedy would work. And what's even sadder is to think how many today are missing out on God's great plan of salvation because they won't look! They would rather go through life with their eyes closed to His outlandish love. Where was this serpent of bronze placed? This metallic snake was put on a pole, meaning they had to not just "look," but "look *up*." Those who *looked up* in faith were healed. That event teaches us about God's love and salvation, doesn't it? It prefigures what happened on the cross when God poured out His love in the death of His Son. If you look at what happened there, and believe that He was there for you, healing will be yours.

- We know this is true, because it literally happened at Calvary. There was one who "looked" and was changed. At the cross, we're told, "When the Centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous Man.'" Luke 23:47. When those words were spoken, heads turned to see who had said them. They had come from a hardened Roman soldier; no a Roman Centurion! It was he who had confessed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah!

Take a look again today at the "extraordinary, beyond measurement" love God has bestowed on us, fallen rebellious sinners, that we should be called God's children. See Jesus bearing your sin, experiencing your death, so that you could inherit His righteousness, His life. There's no reason anyone on earth should lose out on eternal life, because "Jesus paid it all."

Have you ever wished you could have been somewhere to experience an event? I wish I had been at the Escondido Church on a certain Sabbath many decades ago. Jim Ayers was a long-time member of the San Marcos Church. He was already advanced in years when I became pastor here in 1986. But he told the story of a Sabbath when he was serving as deacon at the Escondido Church many years before that. He said that on this day a gentleman approached the foyer and introduced himself as the guest speaker for that day. I can

understand that. On occasion I've been asked to be a guest speaker in a church I've never been in and introduced myself to a deacon in a similar way. After the service, Jim was again at the door shaking hands, and watched as the one who preached that day walked down the sidewalk and "disappeared." He could conclude nothing else but that he had been an angel. Would you like to have been at church that day? Of course, the question was asked Jim, "What was the sermon about?" His reply was, "It was the best sermon on God's love we ever heard."

Are you taking the time to look? If you do, He will change you; you won't be the same. Here is a camera, my Pentax single lens reflex camera. I purchased this camera from a missionary friend back in 1970 while I was a student missionary in Cyprus. It has faithfully taken many thousands of pictures. When I push this little button, in a split second many things happen, the most important of which is that the leaves of the aperture open and allow light to pass through the lens and make contact with the film. That film is not the same anymore; it now bears a reflection, an image, a likeness of what the light brought in.

Our text says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God." It was God's original design that His creatures bear His likeness. We read in Genesis 1:26 "And God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'" And that's what He did. In form and feature, as well as character Adam and Eve perfectly reflected their Creator. But then sin came in and altered the picture. In one of the saddest verses of the Bible is says, "Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son *in his own likeness, after his image*, and named him Seth." Genesis 5:3. At first glance you might ask, "So? What's so tragic about that?" But if we read just two verses ahead this, we read, "In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God." Do you see the difference? There's a world, a universe of difference between those verses! After sin came in, man was no longer "in the image of God," but in the image of fallen man. You and I were born in the image of sinful man.

Although the image was marred, God didn't abort the project, did He. His "beyond comparison" love wouldn't let Him. He immediately went into action, and Jesus pledged His life for fallen man. He would pay the penalty for the sin of mankind. And God's love would go beyond this. He would work to bring man back into harmony with the divine ideal. He would not just wipe away man's sin from the record books in heaven; He would restore man's fallen character and

remake him into the divine image. Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our image," wasn't something God said just once and then gave up on it. Those very words are being spoken today! Today He is saying, "Let Us make John or Mary in Our image."

Like the light that forms an image in the film of a camera, God's truth and grace will change us and make us like Him. A reflection of His character He will produce in us. But there's a catch. All the light in the world might be available, but the film will never change if the aperture doesn't open. The light of God's grace will change us if we open the aperture of our hearts and let Him in. If we open our eyes, if we look, if we behold this "foreign, outlandish" love, He will make us new. Will you take the time to look?

John knew about that love. He had experienced it. He wasn't always a "saint." When he was called to be a disciple, Jesus gave him the nickname "son of thunder." What do you think that means? I think it meant he had an explosive temper. But through the years of allowing God's light to come into his soul, John did become a saint. His temper was placed under the control of reason. He became more and more like his Lord. So he invites us today to look, to behold what kind of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God."

As a gift of that love, and as an illustration of that love, God gave to mankind the beautiful institution of marriage, and today we have the opportunity to thank God for that gift and acknowledge how He has blessed the marriage of Earl and Edythe Willis with 50 years of marriage.

## Renewal Of Wedding Vows Earl & Edythe 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Willis' enter

Song by Patty Pedersen "A Lifetime Of Love"

Homily

For the blessing and benefit of the human race, God bestowed upon His creatures the institution of marriage, a union in which both partners would complement each other, and strengthen each other. In this they would bring glory to God and blessing to each other in selfless acts of devotion. It was designed that this would be a life-long bond. We're refreshed today, in a society that seems to have lost sight of God's original design, to see how His ideal has grown and developed in the marriage of Earl and Edythe.

More than a half a century ago, in 1956, there was a young navy lad serving on the USS Kearsarge, an aircraft carrier. He was single, and he had some religious upbringing. One morning, before daylight, he went out to the deck and walked into a "gun tub," an enclosure which housed two 5 inch guns. As the sun was rising, and as he was there meditating, contemplating on his life, he found himself praying, out loud. "Lord, please lead me to a good Christian girl to marry." That young man was Earl.

God likes to hear prayers like that! He will always work to bring guidance when we ask Him, especially in the major decisions of life. Are you single? Are you contemplating marriage? Ask Him to guide you! Ask Him to give leadership and to work through the circumstances of life to bring you together with one who will be a strength and blessing to you in your walk toward heaven. Yes, there are a myriad of helpful services today, but make sure you avail yourself of "G-Harmony" that is, "God Harmony". The Bible says, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." Proverbs 3:6. Read and study Genesis 24 if you're looking for a Christian mate, and pray to God that He will lead and bless you.

That's what Earl did, and little did he know it, but God was already at work! While Earl was still in the service, his family moved from Ohio to Michigan, and that played a part in the story. When he was discharged, following 30 days of rest, Earl decided it was time to get a job, and found employment at the Save-More Oil Company pumping gas. One of his fellow workers was Ira Jones, who just happened to be a Seventh-day Adventist. Now when I say "just happened," I really don't mean that literally! *God was at work*, arranging the circumstances and happenings; it really wasn't coincidence at all.

Ira wanted to introduce Earl to the sister of one of his friends. So one day, driving into the Save-More station, in a brand new 1957 convertible Chevrolet, was Edythe. That was quite a car! It is still a very popular car today. But I want to take this opportunity to say, "the best things in life aren't things". Cars come and go; things come and go. Relationships, family and friends, marriage partners, if blessed by the presence of God will last. Cars once beautiful can end up in rust, but love nurtured by God's Spirit will last.

But there was a problem: the boss was keeping a watchful eye, and Earl wouldn't be able to go over and casually chat with this young lady, so the only way he found it possible to get acquainted with

Edythe and have a meaningful conversation was to wash her windshield, very carefully. That must have been the cleanest windshield in Michigan! They became acquainted and began dating.

But then Edythe raised a question. If they were going to get serious in their relationship, they should be agreed in their religion. Edythe was a Seventh-day Adventist, and felt that partners in marriage should have the same belief system. In all of this, God was at work! Earl took Bible studies, and found that he accepted the teachings of the Bible as understood by Seventh-day Adventists and was baptized.

And so it was that on September 8, 1957, fifty years ago today, that Earl and Edythe stood together and pledged vows of fidelity to each other, before God and witnesses, some of whom are here today. God blessed their marriage with four children; Dennis, David, Timothy and Sandy.

Church, I'm going to ask for your response on this: if you want to thank the Lord for His blessing in the lives and marriage of Earl and Edythe, let the congregation say "Praise God." If you want to wish them years of continued blessing and happiness, let the congregation say, "Amen."

Now, Earl, will you pledge to continue to love and cherish Edythe as your wife, in good times and bad, through health and adversity, so long as you both shall live? Will you so pledge? Edythe, will you pledge to love and honor Earl as your husband, in good times and bad, through health or adversity, so long as you both shall live? Will you so pledge?

It is my great privilege, seeing that Earl and Edythe have so pledged their vows of fidelity before God, family and friends, to pronounce that they are *still* husband and wife. What God has joined together, let no one come between. Shall we pray.

Song "The Lord's Prayer" by Wes McCoy

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to re-introduce to you Mr. and Mrs. Earl Willis.