

DIVINE LOVE LANGUAGES

FEBRUARY 23, 2020 SERMON

John 3:16: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

I am really cautious about the things I say to Jay because I know that the voice he hears now, telling him how and who he is, will be the voice inside him for the rest of his life. If it is positive and uplifting, he will have to struggle to keep it alive inside him when times are tough. If it is negative and degrading, he will have to struggle against it when times are tough. So I say positive, affirming things to him. I say: *I am so blessed to be your mother. You made our whole family complete.*

And I say, *I am proud of you.* Because I want him to not just value my approval, but also his own, I usually add in: *Are you proud of you, too?* At first, Jay didn't know what to make of that question, but now he gets it. The other day, he did something by himself for the first time, and I said, "I'm so proud of you for all the things you're learning to do on your own. Are you proud of you too?" He said, "Yes. I'm proud of myself." Then he ran his hand lovingly down my face, looked right in my eyes and

said, "And I'm proud of you too, Mommy."

I swooned. I now know what that means. I thought I was gonna fall over. My heart got bigger. Jay was speaking my love language back to me.

I don't know if you've read *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. I have extra copies because I often refer couples to this book. The first book was a book for couples. There's a whole series now. The premise is that we are all programmed with our personality and our life experience to send and receive love in certain ways.

Sometimes couples who love each other very much get into ruts of sending and receiving love in their own individual languages, and if they don't speak the same love languages, their expressions of love can get lost in translation. They love each other, but neither one is feeling loved. Chapman identifies the five love languages as **physical touch, receiving gifts, acts of service, quality time, and words of affirmation.**

My primary love language is words of affirmation. Tell me you're proud of me, and *Muah! Love you too.* My lowest priority love language is receiving gifts.

But the love language thing doesn't just work with couples. It works with anyone you love. So with Jay, I'm super careful with what I say to him because that's my primary love language, that's how I automatically send and receive love. Jay is going to learn, by being my child, to receive words as love. But his personality gives him a different primary love language.

When Jay needs to feel loved, he needs to be with me in some close physical proximity. Velcro kid. Next to me in a chair or slightly on my lap or sharing the same pillow. As a parent, I pay attention to that. *Jay's stuck to me. He needs some love.* And while I want to look him in the eye and tell him he's great, the way to get him to receive my love is to just let him sit on my lap while we watch the octopus stealing the truck scene from *Finding Dory* for the 25th time.

I told you a couple of weeks ago that someone here texted me about those moments in life when something someone said or did maybe didn't mean much to them but meant the world to us. He also said, and this has stuck with me, "How many times do we pass on receiving or missing that important impression from someone? Not willingly missing / avoiding, but because of the fog or distractions we live with or the fact that we miss or are not ready to receive it."

I thought about the love languages. How often do we miss receiving messages of love that are offered to us by others because we're too busy or we're too distracted or because they're offering of love was in something other than our love languages? We miss expressions of love that could change our lives because we don't have the knowledge or the practice or the time to translate it to our hearts. And that made me think about God.

We started the year by talking about spiritual practices we could add to our lives. Adding in spiritual practices is about expressing more love to God in more ways. Reading scripture, fasting, adjusting our attitude to gratitude, making confession by being honest — those are all about showing God love in more ways. But the question that has been burning inside me is — how many messages of love does God send us that we miss

out on because we don't have the knowledge or the practice or the time to translate them to our hearts? What if we all have our own divine love language?

If we think about how people talk about their faith, we can make a pretty good case for that. When people talk about God's love, they talk about it in different and particular ways. I grew up in the Southern Baptist Church. John 3:16, King James Version, was printed everywhere. It was the fundamental scripture of the Southern Baptist Church in the 1980s and 1990s: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." I didn't even have to look it up. It's engraved upon my heart. And it talks about a particular expression of God's love: heaven. Heaven is eternal life — it's God's **rewarding** love. We often sang *When the Roll is Called Up Yonder* at that church.

And here in the UMC, we talk a ton about grace, undeserved forgiveness, God's **accepting** love. Think of the hymn *Amazing Grace*.

If you've struggled with past actions, what you might value most about God's love is mercy, the withholding of deserved punishment. That's God's **merciful** love. We sing a hymn called *There's a wideness in God's mercy*.

These concepts get confusing. I remember a colleague in seminary who preached an entire sermon on God's "grace and mercy." At the end of it, one of us asked him to differentiate grace and mercy, and... he didn't get a good grade on that sermon. They're not the same thing. They're different expressions of the same love. That's why I gave you a handout.

People who say they love God because Jesus died on the cross for them value God's **self-sacrificial** love. Think of the hymn *The Old Rugged Cross*.

People who talk about the resurrection a lot, and who focus on how God conquered death and sin with an empty tomb probably value God's **transformative** love. Think about how much fun we have singing *Up from the Grave He Arose*.

People who talk about God caring for us and providing for our needs value God's **providential** love. Think of the hymn *God will Take Care of You*.

People who talk about their church family when they talk about God — that's an expression of love that came with Jesus, the idea of Christian community, that we do this life together. That's God's **connectional** love. Think of the hymn *We Gather Together*.

People who appreciate most that peace that passes understanding value God's **comforting** love. Where does that homecoming feeling come on Christmas Eve? When we sing the one song that only Bois D'Arc sings on Christmas Eve: *Let there be Peace on Earth*.

There are more ways God expresses God's love for us, but these are pretty big ones that I hear come up when people talk about God. When we talk about our faith in God, which I know is uncomfortable for some of us the ways in which we express how we know God loves us gives values on the ways we receive that love.

In the same way that people who are visual learners will say "I see what you're saying" rather than the tactile learners "I feel you," we have these natural inclinations towards how we receive expressions of love, whether that's from our partner, our kids, our parents, or our God.

And maybe that's why we have so many songs about God's love in our hymnal that use all these different words that seem like synonyms for love, but are actually expressions of that love. Maybe that's why there is so much in the Bible about God's love. And why God expresses God's love for us in so many ways —

Jesus healing,
Jesus lifting up the fallen,
Jesus touching the untouchable,
Jesus speaking to the marginalized,
Jesus physically turning over tables to make things right,
Jesus breaking bread,
Jesus on the cross,
Jesus out of the tomb,

offering eternal reward,
offering mercy,
offering grace,
offering sacrifice,
offering transformation to new life,
offering providence,
offering connection,
offering peace.

God's offer is big and in lots of expressions and in many, many love languages, because it is for everyone and God wants everyone to get it.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

And also, grace for the journey.

Mercy when we stumble.

Sacrifice that pays the price for us.

Transformation to new life.

Providence for our needs.

Brothers and sisters in Christ to help us carry our loads.

Peace that passes understanding.

You get a lot of sermons about God's grace, peace, connection, and resurrection because when I look at the list, them's my things. Those are the ways I most easily recognize God's love.

When I think about the fact that God called even us to serve, that's grace, God's accepting love. When I'm stressed out and suddenly there's peace within that didn't come from me, that's Peace, God's comforting love. When I can help put people the right people together, that's God's connectional love at work. When I see positive change and think "that's God" — that's resurrection, God's transformational love. Those are my divine love languages.

What are yours? And what expressions of God's love do we miss because we don't have the knowledge, the practice, or the time to translate them to our hearts?

Chapman's whole premise is that by learning about how our loved ones express and receive love, we can have more love in our lives because we learn to translate and to receive

messages of love that are intended for us and to send messages of love that can be received. I think we can do the same with divine love, the love of God.

In one of the hymns I mentioned, *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy* Frederick William Faber says:

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind.
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

God's love is broader than our minds can conceive. God expresses that love in so many ways so we can get it in the ways we receive love. But what expressions are we missing? If we learn how God shows love, we will find our cups overflowing. For God **so** loves us. Amen.