

SALT CO
12/8/24
“Sufficiency Completed in Love”

“We love because He first loved us.”
 I John 4:19

WELCOME TO THE SALT CO!

Welcome those who are joining us online.

This is the HUB of Seasoned Adult Ministry. For anyone new...by SEASONED ADULTS we mean:

SEASONED AS IN...

Chronologically-- we've lived a lot of seasons of life

BUT more importantly-

Spiritually--- ...like when sodium and chlorine combined make SALT... by the grace of God, when we receive Christ into our lives we become like THIS [gesture: one hand—two hands—joined together]

We become something beautiful, a *new creation*...transformed and *transforming* for the rest of our lives.

JESUS CALLS US THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

And this is the SALT CO (where we pull off the road to gather, AND share stories about how to faithfully navigate the ever-changing terrain on Route 60+; and Route 60++...and +++...

A place where we re-tool, re-fuel and re-charge.

Explain our approach to seating, mixing, meeting new people, making new connections, keeps our HUB open to someone coming for the first time.

Anniversaries? Birthdays? Carol Howell's birthday is TODAY!! Others?

SALT TALK

For those maybe joining us for the first time...Our theme this fall is “*Living a Psalm 23 Kind of Life*”. We’re using as our guide the book written by Dallas Willard entitled Life Without Lack which we’re recommending but NOT requiring. There’s a copy on each table for you to have a look. Pick up a copy at the bookstore. Each chapter is like a vista viewpoint on the amazing terrain the 23rd Psalm opens up for us.

The other book wrapped in a map is a reminder that we are exploring spiritual terrain together.

That Sierra cup on top of the books is just to suggest what it’s like to live a Psalm 23 kind of life- a life with the Shepherd so full my cup runs over- like a cup full of mountain spring water on a long challenging hike.

We saw in the first and second VISTA points that living a “life without lack” requires us to **first and foremost** re-examine what we believe about who the Lord our God is. Willard urged us to remember that God is the only eternal self-sustaining magnificent being in the universe **and** we are His image bearers unique among the creation. We can share his eternal spiritual and creative nature only in utter dependance upon him.

Willard also warned us that *if our ideas* (and our images; information and subjective impressions) about God are too small, shriveled up-- even sentimental; OR distorted or even outright wrong we will never be able to trust God enough to live a 23rd Psalm kind of life believing we have everything we need; *especially when we don’t have everything we want.*

With God’s greatness as the CREATOR firmly in mind Willard turned our gaze to the good question: *Why are there people on earth?* This was about our calling to His paths of righteousness. We are stewards of the earth in “cooperative responsibility” under God’s good authority.... This is a calling from which there is *no retirement!*

Then our guide knew we were ready for the VISTA of rugged and even treacherous terrain that most of us would perhaps rather skip where we engaged the question: “*Why Such Lack and Evil?*” we confronted the reality of evil in our world, but we also talked about how we can grapple with the evil we encounter by the power of Christ’s life at work in and through us— and so be able to pray, “*I fear no evil...*”

And then our grand tour turned to a sweeping panoramic VISTA. It looks like this:

“Trust in God, death to self opens the floodgate for God’s agape love to flow into us.” Dallas Willard

Willard’s simple graphic tries to show the inextricable relatedness between: Trust/Faith: ---- Death to self---and now where we are heading this morning---to AGAPE LOVE

Two gatherings ago we explored the Vista of Faith/TRUST rooted in our ability to see God as He truly is.

Related to our growth in trusting God comes our “death to self”- submitting our desires to God so that our desires do not take the Ultimate position in our life. Addiction is an extreme example of out-of-control desire. We can be addicted to many things-even good things—like devices or praise. Addictions can so dominate one’s mind and behavior that a person is willing to ignore the good of others just to satisfy a desire, perhaps even to do harm. More about this in a bit.

We saw that when we entrust and submit our desires to God, we are better positioned to seek the GOOD that God wants to bring through us. This also means that increasingly we are content for him to take charge of OUTCOMES.

We become, if you will, like Sierra cups, vessels containing what God pours into us, that spills out onto others. The love of God!

I think this take time. Maybe a lifetime! All our lives we are being formed and shaped, transformed!

Spiritual Director Alice Fryling captures some of what this might look like for those of us traveling on Route 60+:

“Apparently God knows something we are just learning through our senior weaknesses. We are loved by God and by others, not because of all we do, how great we look, or even the legacy we leave behind us. We are loved because God is love and God lives in us. God has loved me all my life, but as I look back on the younger me, I see how much I wanted to prove that

love by being a strong woman, able to get things done, and to be ready to face the hardships of life. The problem was that it became exhausting to maintain my attachment to that self-image. And it was definitely not good for my soul.

As I am losing the capacity to be that young woman, God is inviting me to remember again that Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20) and that my life is not about what I accomplish, but what Christ accomplishes in me. Sometimes we learn more from being weak than from doing things as we used to or according to our own standards. As we let go of our ego expectations, we are better able to hear God say, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness" (2 Corinthians 2:9, NLT).

Alice Fryling, "The Miracle of Growing Older" in DePree Journal.
February 28, 2024. Fuller Seminary

So, Faith/TRUST in God and DEATH TO SELF are essential interior conditions for us to be able and ready to receive from God and share with others: AGAPE LOVE...the terrain we will explore today.

What is Agape Love?

So what is this "agape love"? A love so robust it makes it possible to seek what is good for our enemies?!

Our cultural understandings of "love" will never be an adequate foundation for bearing the weight of a Psalm 23 kind of life.

-Agape love is not sentimentality, like a Hallmark card (or movie) where we seek to feel a certain feeling, or have others feel a certain feeling.

-It is not an impulse or only a desire-- though it *includes* desire. Willard liked to point out that we don't "love chocolate". We want to eat it! We desire it to have it.

To help us take in the expansive meaning of AGAPE LOVE---Willard takes us right "to the source" and calls attention to some revelatory scriptures to anchor and grow our understanding about the nature of love as it is alive in the follower of Jesus- one who is like THIS.

We'll hear four passages read by four readers, who will read their passage twice with a brief silence between. As you listen, you can use your TABLE TALK sheet if you'd to jot down any words or thoughts that strike you as you listen. Invite readers up- four chairs near front.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. John 13:31-35 | John Biggs |
| 2. Romans 12: 9-10 | Nancy Leahy |
| 3. I John 4:11-21 | Steve Solomon or Dick |
| 4. I Corinthians 13:4-7 | Carol Howell |

For Jesus and Paul love has three characteristics

1. Love arises in people whose lives are already marked by certain qualities of the whole self, chief of which are faith in our self-sufficient God and joyful embracing of death to self.
2. Love involves **an orientation of the whole self** toward what is right and good.
3. Love has amazing, supernatural power for good as it indwells the individual.

A couple of observations:

Note that love is not an action, *it is a source of action!* Put this another way, love is a *condition* out of which actions of a certain type emerge.

Also, love is an *orientation toward life as a whole*. It dwells on what is good, seeks the conditions for good. So Paul writes to his friends in Philippi:

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Phil. 4:8

We can use Paul's encouragement to conduct a personal inventory of what you and I are reading, watching, listening to. What do we find ourselves thinking about, and with? Remember, you and I have the great personal power to choose where we will pay our attention, what we will in fact think

about, and with. This is about the conditions you and I help to create in our own souls.

The point is we do not achieve the disposition of agape love by direct effort, but by *training*= attending to and putting into place the *conditions* out of which love arises. The goal is to become the kind of person who naturally and joyfully and easily loves. “Second nature”. AKA the Psalm 23 Kind of Life.

Willard writes,

*“Our aim under love is not to be loving to this or that person, or in this or that situation, but to be a person possessed by love as an overall character of life. Our responses to the specific occasions when we are to act flow out of our overall character. **I do not come to my enemies and then try to love them; I come to them as a loving person.** The good tree bearing good fruit.” (p.166).*

This is where our ideas and information about love are tested. Right?

This is widely thought to be the most radical thing Jesus commands us to do as His followers. What can it mean to “*love our enemies*”?

Notice that in Psalm 23 the LORD spreads a table before us in the presence of my enemies. It’s His table where we are taking nourishment.

Consider the Upper Room feast (aka the “Lord’s Table”). The scene is set in John 13, where He spreads the table...and Judas is present!

If AGAPE LOVE is a capacity to seek what is good in our relationship with God and others--what happens when what someone desires is not good?

We have to be clear that seeking the good of others does not necessarily mean to give others what they desire. It requires the discernment of what is GOOD.

This is not talked about enough in our churches.

What about Jesus “loving the money changers” when he turned over the tables in the temple? They needed healthy correction. Jesus insisted that His Father’s house remain a house of prayer, not a den of thieves.

We need to talk about when seeking the good of another---"agape love" requires saying NO to unjust or destructive desires.

Suzanne and I just saw the movie about the life of German pastor, theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What did it mean to “seek the good of Hitler? Was it “good” to allow Hitler to live out his delusion of supremacy over the Jewish race? Bonhoeffer wrote,

“If I sit next to a madman as he drives a car into a group of bystanders, I can’t, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe, then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer was arrested for participating in a plot to take Hitler’s life.

Willard uses the very helpful description in cases where we encounter oppression, injustice and other harms of ourselves or others as “*Non-cooperation with willingness to harm.*” This is not REVENGE.

Saying “NO” is the most loving thing we can do for those who exalt their harmful desires to an ultimate place and are willing to do harm to get what they want.

When we experience harm at the hands of others agape love helps us grapple with forgiveness.

Because, as Willard reminds us,

“The person who has the most power over your life is the person you have not forgiven. That person holds a part of you in bondage. To forgive is to regain yourself.” (p. 182)

He suggests that we set aside three common errors attached to forgiveness:

1. Forgiveness does not require reconciliation with your enemy
 - Forgiveness is a pre-requisite to reconciliation—**but only where trust is re-established through trustworthy behavior experienced over time**. It's a mistake to conflate forgiveness with reconciliation—they are NOT the same thing. Forgiveness does not require reconciliation.
2. Forgiveness does not require you to forget what happened
 You may never forget what a person did. You may find you treat them differently because you've learned something about how they may have changed, something you didn't know about them before. Forgiveness frees us to seek their good from here on.
3. Forgiveness does not mean you stop hurting

-Instead, forgiveness is a choice not to punish or seek revenge.
 It is how we are released from guilt when we are forgiven, and how we are freed from seeking to get even, to seethe, to hold our hands as fists. It is to open our hands. The GREEK word APHIEMI, means "to release".

So Paul writes,

"Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Col. 3:13

Once again, let's be very clear: we are training to become the kind of person who would love. It is NEVER TOO LATE! In some ways 60+ is the most open, rich with growing in our whole lives. We have lived long enough to know about other ways that cannot fulfill...In fact becoming this kind of person continues all of our lives....!

Let's talk together...

TABLE TALK

1. Describe a person you know or know of who seems to live a life of trust in God, death-to-self and agape love?
2. Why do you think there is so much confusion around what "love" means?

3. How might the definition of agape love as “seeking the good of the other”, help you stand ready to say “no” to someone who is desiring what is not good?
4. Do you have an example you are willing to share of having to practice of non-cooperation with someone else’s willingness to harm you or ones you love?
5. How have your experiences as a Seasoned Adult shaped you as a vessel for God’s agape love?

WRAP UP

Let’s get practical. So how do we love somebody?

We need to decide who we are going to love and how we are going to do it. We are not called to love everybody! Willard points out that no one is an “everybody”. “Everybody” is not a living, flesh-and-blood person. Only God can love everybody as a living flesh-and-blood person!

You and I are called to love our NIGH-BORs. Literally “the farmer nearby”.

-Love Willard’s story about the neighbor who came over to borrow his crescent wrench. (176-177)

-Other examples from my neighborhood- Eli throwing balls back over the fence. Boots feeding our cat.

Here’s an experiment:

Think about who are you going to choose for your experience in love?

-Maybe not someone close to you, might get too complicated for this...

-Someone you work with, a neighbor, someone at church.

-Don’t begin with “hard cases”. Practice on fairly good relationships.

- Set a time frame, like one week.
- Ask God to show you something in this person that is good for which you can be thankful
- This will lead you to wanting to do something for that person for whom you are thankful.
- Think about how you can help that person, a need you can supply, a hardship you can relieve, a load you can lighten, where you can use your abilities and gifts.
- pray for him, her
- You're not trying to prove anything, aim to be a loving person!

In addition... we have some opportunities for you (invite Jen up) .

Psalm 23

***The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not lack.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.***

He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I
will fear no evil.
For you are with me.
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.***

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil.
My cup overflows.***

***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my
life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.***

