

Richie was a shy teenage boy. He'd been watching Jenny walk past his house for weeks. She was a cute teenage girl in his art class at school who lived down the street. The more he noticed her smile and friendly wave the more his heart told him: "Say hello to her."

Weeks turned into a month until he finally decided, "I'm too shy to talk to her, so I'll draw a picture of what I want to say. That way when she walks by, she'll know exactly how I feel about her."

Richie took a container of chalk and went to work using his artistic skills on the sidewalk in front his house. First, he carefully drew a human eye ... then a heart ... and finally a female sheep, a ewe.

He nervously waited for Jenny to walk past his house on her way home from school. As she got close, his heart began beating faster. He stepped off his front porch to meet her at the sidewalk. She stopped, looked down at what he had so beautifully drawn on the sidewalk, began to smile and said: "That's so sweet. You love sheep, too." Jenny didn't get the message Richie was trying to send.

How do you send an "I love you" message? With flowers ... a gift ... a hug ... a card ... a text message full of emojis ... dinner and a concert ... making something? There are lots of ways to say: "I love you."

Even God talks about love in lots of ways in his book, the Bible. But, just as Richie's message of love was misunderstood by Jenny, so God's message of love is misunderstood by many.

In addition, love means lots of things to lots of people. Some "love" their spouse, but they also "love" working out or their pet. Some "love" God, but they also "love" their favorite restaurant, or Kopp's flavor of the day. Some "love" their kids, but they also "love" their favorite sports team.

To fix that, here's a 29-second study on the word LOVE. In English, we only have one word – LOVE. But the Greek of the Bible has 4 words for 4 types of love.

- There's ... *fileo* ... the companionship LOVE between friends.
- There's ... *storge* ... the family LOVE between a child and their parent.
- There's ... *eros* ... the romantic LOVE between a husband and wife.
- There's ... *agape* ... the unselfish LOVE of sacrifice.

Each expresses a type of love that's good. 3 of the 4 – *fileo*, *storge* and *eros* – are feelings and emotions. That means they can change suddenly. They're unpredictable. They can weaken when they see faults and flaws in the other person. Anyone can love someone for a day or a month, for as long as they look good, when they're friendly, when they give you nice things, say nice things and do nice things.

The fourth – *Agape* – is not a feeling or an emotion. It finds expression in action. It's willing to make sacrifices. It continues to love even when the other person becomes unlovable. It doesn't expect anything in return. You've figured out – *Agape* – is the love God has for us, as in **God so loved the world.**

There's something else unique about *Agape* love. Only those who have experienced it can express it. Only a Christian, a Christian couple, a Christian family, a Christian congregation, a Christian school ... where God's love has been experienced ... can it be reflected.

ere's the first recorded example of *Agape* love in the Bible. When God created Adam and Eve they were perfect. They listened to him and loved him. Then, they decided that they didn't want to love God anymore. Do you think God was happy when his prized people told him, "We don't like the way you treat us?" No, he wasn't! But God determined that he would do something to help his sinful people out anyway: "**God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**"

Agape love is an unconditional and undeserved love that says: "No matter who you are. No matter

what you've done. I'm ready to do whatever it takes. No sacrifice is too great. I'm going to stick by you."

The sad truth is the majority of Americans have no clue about this type of love. Most think of love as a romantic feeling or some mushy words. That's the love seen on reality shows and movie screens.

The Bible tells us that *Agape* love is all about action. 1 Corinthians 13, today's lesson, is a list of what love does and does not do in 16 practical ways as we interact with others: ***Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It does not brag. It is not arrogant. It does not behave indecently. It is not selfish. It is not irritable. It does not keep a record of wrongs. It does not rejoice over unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never comes to an end.***

The advantage we, as Christians, have is that we know what this love is because we've experienced it! When we complained to God. When we walked away from God. When we doubted God. He stuck by us and still loved us through our rebellious times.

Since we know what it means to have someone love us unconditionally, that same love flows into the way we deal with each other. The Christian, the Christian couple, the Christian family, the Christian congregation, the Christian school – all places where God's love has been experienced – can say: *"I'm going to stick by you."*

We find so much pleasure in receiving God's love. If we know how wonderful it is, shouldn't we be bending over backwards to show it to others? Then why is loving others so hard? Because our sinful flesh leans towards love-for-self and away from love-for-others.

The Apostle Paul pounds that point home in today's lesson. The congregation in Corinth had no shortage of spiritual gifts, talents and skills. Yet for all the great things they had going for them, there was something noticeably missing.

- ***If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels,***

- ***If I have the gift of prophecy,***
- ***If I know all mysteries and have all knowledge,***
- ***If I have all faith, so as to move mountains,***
- ***If I give away everything I own,***
- ***If I give up my body that I may be burned,***

If I work really hard for the Lord ... ***"but don't have love, I am nothing ... I gain nothing."***

You caught it. Each only saw themselves as important, not others. This wasn't an isolated incident. We're all human, so we all possess the same characteristic. We're all sinful, self-absorbed people by nature. It didn't take us long to learn words like *"mine"* and *"no,"* or to learn actions when we don't get our way.

Even with the constant reminders we had growing up – we still have issues with sharing and putting others first. And, we carry it with us when we come to church, which is the place it shouldn't be.

Agape love must be the outstanding characteristic for us. It needs to be. It's the focus in today's Gospel. **A new command: love one another!** The command isn't new. What's new is that we have a crucified and risen Savior speaking it to us.

He is the perfect demonstration of God's love for us and the perfect example for us to follow. He was patient and kind. He always protected, always trusted, always hoped, always persevered.

What's new for Christ's people ... new every day ... God's love motivates us to want to imitate his love. Every day we are concerned about our lack of love, we repent. Every day we hear the comforting voice of our Good Shepherd who forgives us.

Let's not only pray, but let's work at making sure that our corner of God's kingdom ... our church and school ... would be characterized by *Agape* love. *Agape* love is based on actions. We look for times to show it to those around us who do not know about Jesus. We cherish those times when we can show it to our brothers and sisters in Christ.