

During World War II the Solomon Rosenberg family was exiled to a work concentration camp where life literally depended on whether or not one could work for long hours each day. The family consisted of two aged parents, as well as Solomon, his wife, and two sons, Jacob and Joshua. Solomon knew that the first to die would be his aged parents since they were unable to work the many required hours. He feared the next to die would be their son Jacob since he was physically handicapped. Each day he would come back to the camp and hurriedly look around to see if Jacob was still there. One day his greatest fear was realized; Jacob was missing. He rushed to his son Joshua who was huddled in a corner crying. "Where is Jacob?" he shouted. "They came and took him," Joshua said. "Then where is Mama?" he asked Joshua, "She was well enough to work...where is she?" Joshua clinging to his father said, "When they came to Jacob, Mama said he could not go alone, and so she went with him."

Mama went with him to the gas chambers, because she did not want him to go alone.

In an even greater way, Jesus went to the gas chambers—the cross of death and the grave—so that we might not go alone. And in going, He became for us the way to eternal life, "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). There is no greater act of love than that one die for another. The Scriptures tell us "while we were still sinners" (Rm. 5:8), Christ's action brought about life for us through His death.

During this Advent season we have reviewed the nature of God's love. Jesus personified this love. Over the last few weeks we've seen how Christ demonstrated His love in a variety of ways. Last week, we saw how He demonstrated it through affirmation of words. The week before, we saw that Christmas love consisted of giving time. And today we will see that the nature of God's love also includes acts of service. A person whose primary love language is acts of service feels most loved when others do things for him. Because we know that man was created in the image of God, we can expect to see all of the five primary love languages, and more, in God our Father.

Liza Doolittle in "My Fair Lady" sang, "Words, words, I'm tired of words. If you love me show me." She paraphrases the inspired words of James: "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (Ja. 2:14-17). Jesus repeatedly said that it was important to not only hear the Word of God but to put these words into practice (Lk. 6:47-49).

Acts of service are those things done for another person such as washing his clothes, preparing a meal, mowing grass, or putting the bicycle chain back on. A person whose love language is acts of service is in the church kitchen preparing a meal for the senior citizens. He is planting flowers in front of the church.

A wife may say to her husband, "I love you," but he's thinking, "That can't be true, because if she loved me, she'd do something around this house instead of leaving it such a mess all the time." He doesn't feel loved at all, despite the fact that she says it, because his love language is acts of service. He's saying to himself, "Do something for me and I'll feel loved."

It was early in His ministry when Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth. As He was reading the Scriptures in the temple, He opened the scroll to Isaiah 61 and read the words of our text: “The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn...” (Isa. 61:1-2) This was clear prophecy of the promised Messiah. When Jesus completed the reading of these words, He said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:21). And so He proclaimed to all that He was the promised Messiah. His hometown people refused to believe Him and the synagogue leaders literally forced Him out of town. From that point on Jesus began His three-year ministry with acts of service. In performing the miracles spoken of, He clearly showed Himself to be the Messiah. He healed the sick. He gave sight to the blind. He calmed the stormy sea. He cast out demons. He raised the dead. These supernatural feats proved Him to be the Christ, the promised Messiah.

Christ’s love is more than words; it is alive with action. Today, we live in a world where love is based on feelings. When feelings are gone we hear, “I love her but I’m not in love with her.” Translated this means, “I don’t feel in love with her anymore.” In counseling a couple about to get married, it is not unusual to hear them say things like, “He makes me feel so good when I’m with him.” Too many people assess their love on the basis of feelings, and thus, because feelings come and go, so does love.

God’s love given to us is never based on feelings, but on the promises of His Word. Even when we don’t feel loved by God, He is loving us. Though there is no DNA test for love, God’s Word offers some noticeable signs of love: “Love is kind...not jealous...does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor. 13:4, 6). Do you want to know whether or not your boyfriend really loves you? Ask yourself, “Does he encourage me to do what is right?” If you’re alone and he encourages you to show your affection beyond what is right in God’s eyes, your siren should be going off! This guy doesn’t love you. He may love having sex with you, but he doesn’t love you according to God’s standards, and hopefully yours as well.

Christmas is about love, God’s love shown to us in more than just words but demonstrated to us in a very concrete way...the presentation of a baby...born of flesh...lying in a manger. It was love in action. It was love filled with forgiveness—forgiveness won through His actions, His life, death, and resurrection. Even as we confess this morning our lack of service to others, He covers us with Christmas love—with Christmas acceptance.

This Advent invites us to love in more than just words; it invites and challenges us to demonstrate His love with our actions. Through Word and Sacrament such actions become possible.

Christmas love denies us the comfort of being passengers and summons us to be members of the crew. It denies us the privilege of being spectators and calls us to be members of the team. It beckons us to be more than a part of the audience; it invites us to join in playing in the orchestra.

This season forces us to ask when we last fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, sheltered strangers, clothed the naked, visited the sick, or went to those in prison.

Christmas love is more than saying “Good Morning!” It is making the coffee.

Christmas love is more than saying “If I can do anything, just let me know.” It is making dinner and serving it.

Christmas love is doing something kind for your family—getting a blanket, cleaning off the table, scrubbing the bathtub—without being asked! Christmas love is letting the young mom with three kids move up ahead of you in the long checkout line. It is taking out your neighbor’s trash. It’s making sure the poorest families in your parish receive Christmas gifts.

Christmas love is about loving for the sake of love. Vacuuming the floor for your loved one may not come naturally...it may not be done because you want to...but you do it! Why? Because of love...that’s the reason...the only reason. This Advent season, ask yourself, who in your family has the primary love language of acts of service? Once you’ve identified them, make some plans to share Christmas love with them by doing something special for them!

God does not demand that we follow him. Truth be told, God has given us a free will. We can choose to follow and love God by serving as Christ has served us. Or we can walk away from God and turn from his love and choose to live a self-centered life. Just as Jesus served his disciples, he called on them to serve others. Notice that this isn’t a demand – Jesus never tells anyone that they *have* to follow him or obey him – Jesus calls us to be in a relationship with him, to serve him, to love him and obey him. For Christians, the best way for us to express our love for God comes through our life of service for others. For **When we serve others, we are serving God.**

Jesus Christ is the ultimate servant. By freely giving up his life, he rescued this world from sin and death. He redeemed this world and all the people who live in it from fear and shame. Jesus calls us to a life of freedom, a life without fear. When we serve others, we are showing God our love for him. This is not a trap or a list of requirements, but it is our response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Now some of us are wired in a way where the best way for others to communicate love is through acts of service. Just by washing the dishes or mowing the yard or picking up the house can be the best way to communicate you love.

I’d like to share with you three observations that come along with this love language – these are especially meaningful for marriage couples. But for those of your who are not married or widowed, these observations can hold true to all your relationships.

Observation #1) What we do for each other before marriage is no indication of what we will do after marriage. Often during the dating and courting stages of relationships, we do many acts of service to express our love. This is all great until after the wedding when our actions are sometimes more influenced by the model of our parents, our own personality, our

perceptions of love, our emotions, needs, and desires. We may fall back on the former routines of life rather than continue the actions done during courting.

Observation #2) Love is a choice and cannot be coerced. Love cannot flow in the absence of choice. When a loved one criticizes your work or placing demands on your love, that tends to drive wedges into that relationship. It is true that with enough criticism, you may get your loved one to do what you wanted them to do, but it will not be an expression of love. The acts of service would not flow from a heart filled with love, but rather out of fear or shame. Criticism empties the Love Tank.

Observation #3) My loved one's criticisms about my behavior provide me with the clearest clue to his or her primary love language. This is sometimes hard to hear or understand. But if you do find yourself in a relationship where you are often criticized, most people tend to criticize their loved ones most loudly in the area where they themselves have the deepest emotional needs. Their criticism is an ineffective way of pleading for love. Here are a couple of ideas for those who might find themselves in this situation.

Criticism often needs clarification. You can turn this possible time of hurt into an opportunity for growth. You can ask your loved one, "This sounds extremely important to you. Could you explain why it is so crucial?" Initiating such a conversation may eventually turn the criticism into a request rather than making it a demand. It can help both people involved in that relationship to better understand each other.

There might also be a need to have **A willingness to examine and change stereotypes is necessary in order to express love more efficiently.** Sometimes learning the love language of acts of service will require some of us to re-examine our stereotypes of the roles in relationships – especially between a husband and a wife. Sometimes, in order to meet the needs of our mate, we will need to break the mold of what we think is right, and seek to serve the other for the sake of love.

May the Lord enable you to love the people God has placed around you with a servant's heart. Amen.