

McCabe United Methodist Church
“Amazing Power of Love”
I Corinthians 13:1-7
Pastor Ray Baker
06-17-12

There was once a little boy named Jack. He had red hair and freckled- face. He had lived in an orphanage for as long as a ten (10) year old boy could remember. Whenever the orphanage was expecting a guest who might adopt one of the children everyone went through the same routine. They laid out their best clothes. Grabbed their towels and stood in line for the showers. Then they put on their “Sunday best” clothing and stood in a receiving line to greet the new guests.

The guest would walk up and down the line inspecting the children and asking them a few questions. One by one they would be asked to return to their rooms...until the last child received the news that they were being adopted.

This happened time after time...and Jack was always sent back to his room. In fact, it wasn't uncommon for Jack to be one of the first kids to be sent to their room. But Jack never gave up hope. He knew that someday they would pick him. Some day there would be a family that would offer him the love and security he yearned for.

Things continued without change. The kids would learn guests were coming; they would shower and put on their “Sunday best.” They would meet the potential parents and...Jack would return to his room. Without fail...it was the same way week after week and month after month.

One day the kids lined up to meet the new guests...the potential parents... and the kids were excited because they arrived in a big car driven by a chauffeur. A handsome young couple stepped out of the car and made their way inside. They greeted and inspected the children one by one...and to Jack's surprise he wasn't set back to his room. One by one, the other children returned to their rooms until Jack was the last one standing.

His new dad said to him, “Jack, we would like to have you come home with us. We live in a big beautiful house with a swimming pool, we will give you your own room, you will have a TV and a computer all to yourself, and ... we will even get

you a dog. We will give you more than you've ever dreamed of.... What do you say? Do you want to live with us?"

Jack lowered his head and looked at his shoes. He paused for a long time. One of those minutes that seems to last an hour. Have you ever been there? Then he said: "That sounds wonderful...but I think I'll just stay here."

The woman who ran the orphanage was shocked by his answer. She knew how excited he was to be adopted. She took Jack aside and asked: "Jack, what's the matter? This family has offered you a great home with everything you could ever want. Why don't you want to go with them?"

Jack replied: "What I want more than everything they've offer me is... someone to love me?"

Isn't that what we all want...more than anything else? Isn't that the Good News, God loves us more than we could ever imagine!

A few years ago a nationwide poll asked, What word or phrase would you most like to hear uttered to you, sincerely?

Can you guess the first thing people wanted to hear? You're right: I love you. The second was, You are forgiven. (With thanks to James A. Harnish, Walking With Jesus: Forgiveness, Tampa, Fla., March 22, 1998.)

How long has it been since we have heard these words spoken to us?

The amazing thing is these word are at the heart of our Christian Faith. It's what we're all about. The words "I love you" are about God's unconditional love. The words "You are forgiven" are about God's unmerited grace.

Kathy Troccoli is a Christian musician that wrote a book called: "My Life Is in Your Hands." The book contains this wonderful story:

"When my niece Gina was very little, we would engage in that familiar exchange you have with children you're crazy about. I asked her one day, 'Do you know how much I love you?'

"She looked at me with eager and excited expectation. 'All the way to the sky,' I said.

She climbed into my lap. 'Well, I love you all the way to the ocean,' she said.

"Oh yeah?' I squeezed her tight and tickled her gently. 'Well, I love you all the way to heaven.'

"Well, I love you ...' she began, then, 'I love ... I love you' She contemplated her answer more intensely. Finally, taking a deep breath, she said, 'I love you all the way to K-Mart in the toy department.'

"The two of us laughed and laughed. Gina thought she had given me the biggest and best possible answer.

"I suppose if you told Jesus, 'I love you all the way to ...' he would answer back that he loved you all the way to the cross -- and that he'll continue to love you throughout eternity. It takes your breath away, and you can only respond with a heart of thankfulness."

The second most important phrase was: "You are forgiven" -- God's unmerited grace.

There was a little boy visiting his grandparents on their farm. And he was given a slingshot to play with out in the woods. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit the target. And getting a little discouraged; he headed back to dinner.

As he was walking back, he saw Grandma's pet duck. Just out of impulse, he let fly, hit the duck square in the head and killed it. He was shocked and grieved.

In a panic, he hid the dead duck in the woodpile, only to see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Grandma, Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today, didn't you, Johnny?" And then she whispered to him, "Remember, the duck?"

So Johnny did the dishes.

Later Grandpa asked if the children wanted to go fishing, and Grandma said, "I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper." But Sally smiled and said, "Well, that's all right because Johnny told me he wanted to help." And she whispered again, "Remember, the duck?"

So Sally went fishing, and Johnny stayed.

After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's, he finally couldn't stand it any longer. He came to Grandma and confessed that he killed the duck. She knelt down, gave him a hug and said, "Sweetheart, I know. You see, I was standing at the window, and I saw the whole thing. But because I love you, I forgave you.

"But I was just wondering how long would you let Sally make a slave of you"

Imagine for a moment that Jesus Christ has been standing at the window watching our successes and failures. He's seen the whole of our lives lived out before him...and...he still says: "I love you and I forgive you."

(-Cited in Vanguard Magazine Online)

Christ has told our world exactly what we want...what we need to hear. "I love you and I forgive you."

Our current sermon series is based on "6 Amazing Bible Stories to Strangely Warm Our Hearts" by James W. Moore