

"PLAYING 'LET'S SUPPOSE' WITH GOD"

Scripture: John 15:10-14

INTRODUCTION

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I have a delightful custom in my church which I hope I use with wise discrimination. For many years I have welcomed suggestions concerning sermon topics. It has proved an interesting and challenging adventure - somewhat embarrassing at times, I must admit.

Not so long ago one of the fine girls of my congregation handed me a clipping from the Good Housekeeping magazine - just one sentence. This is what I read: "If God loved you as much as you loved him, where would you be?" She wanted me to make a sermon based on that idea.

I put it in my pocket with an indulgent smile and promptly forgot it for awhile. It sounded so "wall mottoish" - like some I had seen in Sunday School classes: "If every member of the class were just like me, what kind of a class would this class be." However, the more I thought about it the more I was intrigued with the idea. It would not be downed. I began to see a word that was not there in the printed lines, but most surely was there by implication. It was the word ONLY. And I began to read: "If God loved me ONLY as much as I loved him, where would I be?"

Oh, I know we profess to love God with all our mind, soul, and strength. But if we take our actions as a basis of our love - and that is the only thing by which we can judge ("By their fruits shall ye know them") - I wonder just where we would be after all. Therefore, this morning I want to play an ancient child's game with you in a very adult and mature sense, the game of "Let's suppose". Let's suppose that God did not love us any more than we love Him, where would we be?

So, let us pause here and ask ourselves the method by which we express our love and then see how we measure up to the love of God as we express it through these methods. I know a lot about Divine Love, but it is locked up in my heart, and I can't express it except in human terms. God, you see, is greater than our hearts.

I. SUPPOSE GOD DID NOT THINK ABOUT US ANYMORE THAN WE THINK ABOUT HIM;
WHERE WOULD WE BE?

The very least thing we can do in expressing love is to think about the person we love. We all want to be thought of by those who love us. We get a letter, it may be in joy or sorrow, and that person says, "I am thinking about you", how good that makes us feel! Let's suppose God did not think about us anymore than we think about him where would we be. The universe would run into chaos, we know that. We know that our Heavenly Father - the Infinite One who holds the universe in the hollow of his hands - thinks of us every moment of the day and gives constant watch care to us his children. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without his knowledge, even the hairs of our head are numbered: he clotheth the grass, he feedeth the birds, will he not much more take care of you? "Greater Love hath no man". We say that glibly, like memorized platitudes - words of an enthused catachist, but do you realize the great significance of a God who takes care of every last and least detail of his children's welfare. It is too much for our feeble minds to grasp. Yes, dull and callous souls fail to comprehend it. But it has not only a personal meaning for our lives; it has a cosmic significance and outreach as well. Yes, he thinks about us every moment of the day, and watches us every moment of the night. He cares for you:

He sends the sunshine and the rain,
He sends the harvest's golden grain
Sunshine and rain, harvest of grain,
He's my friend.

Yes, God cares for us. Not a moment of the day passes without his thinking about us - we cannot draw a breath of air into our lungs - without his care. Let's suppose, then, that God did not think of us anymore than we think of him, where would we be. That's just it, we wouldn't be. Life would never be sustained on that basis.

II. SUPPOSE GOD DID NOT WANT TO EXPRESS HIS LOVE IN FELLOWSHIP TO US ANYMORE THAN WE DO TO HIM, WHERE WOULD WE BE?

Another evidence of Love is a desire for fellowship, and the expression of love through fellowship. Any two persons wishing to share a spiritual experience, which true friendship really is - must use some accredited and mutually recognized symbols. The failure to do this makes the parties involved seem to belie the very thing they wish to affirm. For instance: Suppose you have a friend - as you do - there must be certain physical media to which you resort in expressing that friendship - a smile, handclasp, a knowing look, the voice (we speak to each other; if nothing more than a glad hello). If you have a friend in trouble and you come and just lay your hand in hers or place your arm around his shoulder, you do not have to say anything, it means everything in the world. It is an accredited and mutually recognized symbol of your friendship. These, then, are symbols of friendship. If you dispense with, see where you are! Suppose, for instance, one of your friends were to meet you on the street and pass you by without even looking at you; suppose one of your friends would come into the same room with you and did nothing, just stood there - not using one of the mutually recognized symbols of friendship. What would you do or think? You would know something was wrong, something had come between you, and he would belie the very thing he might have wished to affirm.

God is always pictured as longing, yearning, for the fellowship of his children. God created man that he might have kindred fellowship on earth, and he has always desired to enter into the fellowship of his children. Some of the most exalted words that have ever been written were those which tell us that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him"; and then it goes on to say that God "breathed into man the breath of life; and man became a living soul". God created a kindred spirit with which he could fellowship and could fellowship with him. He went about the Garden of Eden calling, "Adam, Adam where are thou"? And so today he is still calling us; still searching for his children. He wants to take us up in his great strong arms of comfort when we are troubled; he yearns to have us lean heavily upon his everlasting arms when we are weary; he longs to show us the way through the dark valley of the shadow when we are in the depths of sorrow; and he is willing, above all things to stoop down - yea, even into the mire of sin and degradation, and lift us up when we have fallen. That is God, my friends, yearning for the fellowship of his children.

How much do we fellowship with God? How much do we practice his presence daily? How much do we recognize him as a factor in our lives? How much do we meditate and pray? What communion do we hold with our friend? Suppose we merely tipped our hats to our wives each morning and merely waved a "Goodbye" each night. Where would we be? How much would our love amount to?

Yes, Let's suppose that God did not want to express his love to us in fellowship any more than we did to him, where would we be? Yes, where, would we be? Lost and damned creatures, that's where.

III. SUPPOSE GOD DID NOT KEEP HIS PROMISES ANY BETTER THAN WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS, WHERE WOULD WE BE?

Still another evidence of love is obedience: "If ye love me keep my commandments". If we love our parents we will desire to obey, not obedience compelled by command but obedience impelled by love. The thing that crushes a parents heart more than anything else is, not the evil acts that children commit, but that they go against the love of a parent, doing things out of keeping with their will. Thus, with God. He deplores the fact of evil in the world, but the thing that crushes his heart is that a child to whom he has given the best in life should turn his back on him.

Is it that we love God when we look at our contemporary civilization and see a rich America drinking itself so sodden that like Belshazzar of old we fail to see the handwriting on the wall. When we have a national drunkenness so great that we are consuming the highest per capita of any nation of the world, much in excess to France.

Is it that we love God, when we wink at the moral looseness and laxness of our day which brings the number of illegitimate children to an ever rising crescendo to be driven into the desert of social ostracism with Ishmael and Hagar.

Is it that we love God when under the shadow of Christian institutions, family faithfulness and fidelity is so disregarded that the fiendish monster of divorce reaches with his brutal claws into one out of every three homes established - and now the ratio keeps dropping. And also, by the disruption of our basic family life which sends the occupants of the homes their different ways seeking synthetic and artificial amusement; thereby, breaking down the basic unit of civilization.

Is it that we love God, when we have allowed an economic order to dominate us which sacrifices personality for profits, material output for spiritual intake, abundance of living for abundance of things. I began my ministry in the beginning of the depression, and I saw then little children begging for the crumbs that fell from a bounteous table, while a few fared sumptuously everyday. No dogs, by licking, have ever been able to heal the sores on these personalities. And it took a war time economy to rectify that situation. Can a society be Christian that allows a Lazarus to beg the crumbs from Dives table? Can we allow it to happen in Christian America again? It may happen in America, but not in Christian America.

Is it that we love God, when we stand in the churches on Sunday morning and sing with a kind of sticky sentimentality,

Join hand, then, brothers of the faith
What-e'er your race may be
Who serves my Father as a son
Is Surely kin to me,

and then go out of the church and meet a man of different pigmentation of the skin and he is no longer a brother, but a dam nigger. One of the things we can never do in a Christian America is to go back to our former racial consciousness. This question has wider implications than the negro problem. It embraces the entire world. The brown, the red, the yellow - as well as the black. These people are awake: My how they are awake! And they are saying, "If we are betrayed as we have fought side by side with the whites for democracy, there is nothing left for us to do but to unite for our own protection. Did you know there are 60 million babies born in the world each year, and that 43 million of them are colored babies? Only 17 million white. What will that do for the balance of the population in the next 25 years? Here-to-fore racial prejudice has been immoral - It always will be - but now it is also suicidal as well as grossly unchristian.

Is it that we love God when we look at a world in which more than 90% of its peoples were caught in the bloody shambles of war and we were compelled to look and see the grim reaper with his scythe dripping with blood of not only millions of soldiers, but millions of innocent women and children also. Is it that we love God when we allow conditions to arise that make it seemingly necessary for us to butcher one another. Is it that we love God when we become bitten by the same philosophy that makes our enemies rise up to smite us, and want to train our boys in peace time to fight the next war for which they will be preparing?

Is it that we love God when we as Church members climb our pillars of retreat and security like some Simon Skyletes of old and simply try to be good when this world needs so many good things done for it. The Church can never again be a parlor of retreat - with overstuffed furniture where saints can sit supinely by when a world is rotting about their heads. We must actively enter the battle of righteousness; we must dominate or be dominated; we must come to the front of moral leadership or be driven to the catacombs.

These are our actions, personal, social and international. For this is how we love God: "By his fruits ye shall know them".

These are our evil deeds and God deplores them. This is how we keep his commandments. Truly God must cry himself to sleep at night as Bill Stidger supposes in one of his poems. But the thing God deplores most is that we his children to whom he has given the best in life would ever turn our back on him.

We can be well assured that God will never turn his back on us. Even though we do not keep his commandments he will always keep his promises. His love as expressed in his glorious promises is not conditioned upon our obedience. Many of you lift your heads above the swirling currents of life in this time and are tempted to say with Wordsworth: "The world is too much with us". Then it is we hear the master's voice: "Come unto me all that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest". Has God ever gone back on that great promise? **Never!**

"Are you weak and heavy laden
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior still our refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

We kneel so weak, we rise so full of power. Many of are keenly aware of the "intolerable weight of this weary world" and like our colored brethern are seeking some river where we can lay down our burden. We listen again and hear his voice: "Cast ~~thy~~ burden upon the Lord and I will sustain thee". Who of us this morning has ever had a real burden of life that was pressing you down and you went to the Lord for help and you came away unrewarded. We know it is true because we have tried it.

"No matter what may be the test
God will take care of you.
Lay weary one upon his breast
God will take care of you.

It is growing dark and weary but the darkness can not put out the light if he is there. The way may be sad and lonely but we do not have to walk it alone. The future appears hopeless and gloomy but with him comes the brightness of the dawn and hope. How can we say this simply because we have found one of his promises to be eternally true: "Lo, I am with you always". What hope and courage this brings. With him with us nothing is dark, no way is lonely; all future hopes are bright: "Lo, I am with you"- this is the promise that never fails.

These are things that we just can not do without in life - it is these promises of our Heavenly Father of rest to the weary, sustaining power for heavy burdens and eternal presence upon the long road of life. Let us suppose that God did not keep his promises any better than we keep his commandments but praise be unto our Heavenly Father. His love as expressed in his glorious promises is not conditioned upon our obedience. It is not necessary for us to have concern about his love for us. We need only concern ourselves about our love for him. If there is a single soul lost it will be because they have wandered so far from the good, have become so loveless that God's love will not reach them; but they are still his and he will follow them down to their doom - and their doom will break his heart. That is the kind of God we have. That is the way he loves us. Loving us with a love divine all loves excelling.