

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI
DEACON ORDINATION

Sunday, November 16, 2014

Title: Love Her

Text: I Corinthians 13

A deacon whose faith had been revitalized during a Sunday night evangelistic service came to the minister to tell him he was now ready to live for Jesus and available for service. The minister prayer with him, thanked him, and assured him that he would be called upon. Later that same night a widowed mother in the church called the minister and said she was desperate for a ride for her young son to the hospital the next day for a long-scheduled appointment with a specialist doctor. The hospital was 50 miles away in the city, and her ride had fallen through. Smiling to himself at the seemingly providential provision of God, the minister called the deacon and asked him to take this task. At first, the deacon protested that he would have to take a half-day off of work, but relented under the minister's gentle reminder that he had said he was available for service.

So the deacon arranged the time off work and went to the woman's house the next morning. The mother was unable to go because of her other children, so he carried the little boy (who was unable to walk on his own) out to his pickup and set him down beside him in the seat. When they had driven awhile, the boy said, "You're God, aren't you?" The deacon said, "No, of course not. Why would you say that?" The boy said, "Last night I heard my mother crying and praying to God to send someone to take me to the hospital. I thought you must be God." The boy was quiet for a minute, and then he said, "If you're not God, you work for him, don't you?"

The deacon paused and with tears in his eyes and a thrill in his heart, said, "Now more than ever, son. Now more than ever."

Now more than ever – Ray, Mark, Glenna, John and Heather. Now more than ever.

Take note of the “more than ever”. It tells the truth that working for God has already been a practice in each of you. Your family of faith recognizes that and because of what they witness already, they have called you out from among them and are charging you with to “now more than ever.” What a humble and overwhelming honor and responsibility. I know each of you well enough to know that when you received the call about serving as a deacon, you probably experienced a moment of hesitation, maybe even shock - *me? A deacon?* As it should be for becoming a deacon isn't a position we seek or feel we are owed. Becoming a deacon is something that others see in us and something we surrender to. Your family of faith has witnessed in you humble, loving service to God and to others. The covenant you make tonight is “now more than ever” I will lovingly and faithfully serve Jesus Christ and his bride, the church.

The thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is known as the love chapter and is one of the most quoted Scriptures at weddings. I've used it myself at several weddings I've officiated. And although it is an excellent guide for couples beginning a lifetime of love, I'd like to rescue it from the tole, and tuxedos and the painful renditions of “I Will Always Love You.” When the Apostle Paul wrote this letter, he wasn't thinking of romantic love. He was thinking of a different kind of family, a faith family.

We use the word “family” all the time in our youth ministry here at First Baptist. Nearly every time we gather or post a picture, you'll hear or see us mention family. #refugefamily We use the word family to teach. We use it so we have something to aspire to. We use it to give a name to what we are trying to create – a family of faith.

Three of our deacon-elects are active youth leaders in our youth ministry. A week ago, we were on a weekend retreat with about 40 youth. These three gave up a weekend of sleep and the comfort of home and sleep and some football games in order to go. Why? Because they love these young people. They believe in them. They root for them. They pray for them. They serve them. They are burdened for them. I know enough about these youth workers to know that when they returned from the weekend exhausted, they still woke up praying for and thinking

about the youth. Because God has burdened them and filled them with love for our young people.

All five of these newly elected deacons feel this way about our church. They love her. They serve her. They believe in her. They pray for her. They root for her. They sacrifice for her. God has burdened them with a deep love for the mission and vision of this congregation – otherwise they would not have said “yes” to such an undertaking.

The culture that surrounded the Corinthian believers was a culture that knew very little of real love. Or perhaps they maybe knew it when they saw it, but they simply did not see it. What they saw and what they experienced in Corinth was people using people – for greed, for pleasure, for gain. What they saw and experienced was a love that was boastful, conditional and self-serving. The family of faith had to be different. The family of faith had to love one another like their Father loved. Otherwise, everything they said, believed or did, was void of meaning and value.

Paul urges the church to remember that if humble, selfless, God-like love is not the origin of every spiritual gift and every act of worship, than those gifts and acts are meaningless.

If you teach a Bible Teaching class but don't love ...

If you take the offering or give 20% but don't love ...

If you pray and sing songs but don't love ...

If you volunteer for a church work day or sing in the choir but don't love ...

If you greet at the door or never miss a prayer meeting but don't love ...

If you dress modestly and never speak inappropriately but don't love ...

If you have faith that moves mountains and knowledge that reveals all mysteries but don't love ...

If you become a deacon but don't love than you simply have a title.

This week, as I reflected on Paul's list of deacon do's and don'ts, it dawned on me that the entire list could be summed up in one word - relationship. Deacons who genuinely care about

their interpersonal relationships will be people who fulfill the biblical mandate. Deacons who genuinely care about their relationship with Christ will “hold the deep truths of faith with a clear conscience.” Relationships form the solid foundation upon which deacon service is built.

The best deacons I know are those who passionately love God and who have the heart of Christ for others – both in the community of faith as well as the community of life. A deacon is committed to relationships.

A deacon is also committed to being before doing. In the New Testament writings concerning deacons there is more emphasis on what deacons are to BE rather than on what they are to DO. This is because being always comes before doing. Deacons are to BE men and women of Christian maturity; they are to be right with God, their family, and their fellow believers in every way before they can DO their jobs. You are not being ordained tonight to DO. You are being ordained tonight to love God and our church and to let that love be the wellspring of your ministry. A deacon is committed to relationships. A deacon is committed to being before doing.

And a deacon is committed to unity and fellowship. The loudest champions of the church should be deacons. The strongest advocates for the church should be deacons. We expect you to love and cherish this family so much that as a deacon you constantly strive to keep her healthy and strong. In other words, you are charged with doing all you can to keep our fellowship sweet. You may remember the sixth chapter of Acts tells us that the incident in the early church that led to the formation of deacons in the first place was the absence of unity ... caused by the grumbling and complaining of some widows who felt they were being overlooked and even shortchanged in the daily distribution of food. With the help of those first seven deacons, peace was restored and the Word of God prospered. Just like those first seven deacons, all deacons here at First Baptist are charged with preserving unity and love in this family of faith. Unity is a fragile thing – it can easily be damaged or destroyed by idle words of gossip or by quarreling, grumbling or complaining. Deacons should build the church up, not

tear her down. Deacons are committed to relationships. Deacons are committed to being before doing. Deacons are committed to unity and fellowship among the family.

The rest of us here tonight are not off the hook. This is not a graduation ceremony, or a public award for service. This is not just about these five; it is about all of us, about what it means to be followers of Jesus and to be committed to a family of faith. All members of the family are expected to be committed to relationships, to being before doing and to unity and fellowship.

But we have chosen from among us five brothers and sisters who are humbly leading by example. Five brothers and sisters who join another sixty-seven that we have ordained to be servants of God and to this family. We trust you to love us unconditionally. We look to you for examples of love and service. We believe that our burdens will be your burdens. We implore you to prayerfully intercede for us. We need you to help us work through conflict, not create or inflame it. We expect you to never let us forget our God-given mission.

Tonight, we ordain you to whole-heartedly love God and our family of faith.

Now, more than ever.