

“Love is What You Do”

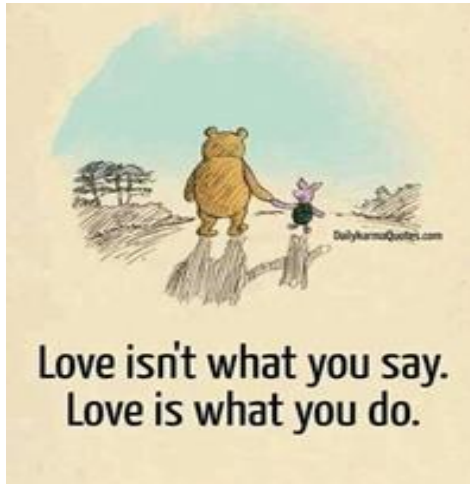
September 2nd, 2018
1 Corinthians 13

Special service featuring **Our Kenyan Kids** Charity
Wall Street United Church

(Speakers Rev. Doug Warren, Rita Van Spriel, Jan Murray)

Doug Warren:

How many songs have been sung, sermons spoken, and books written about “love”? But, how many of us, *really* understand what love looks like. Winnie the Pooh has simplified it for us, by telling us that **“Love**



isn't what you say. Love is what you do.”

Since the Bible tells us that “God is Love” somewhere in our theological musings we understand God as a “doing Being”. God as “embodied love” was clearly seen in Jesus who was on the move touching human lives: healing, consoling, teaching, lifting, and yes, scolding those who acted apart from compassion and love. And, today for the next several minutes I want us to think about how the “doing-love”, is being expressed by many of us here at Wall Street United Church; way

beyond our walls, in Kenya, East Africa.

In 2003 I stood with my cousin, John, in a Children’s Home in Nairobi, Kenya. We were surrounded by children whose heads didn’t reach our knees, and whose hands were either hugging our legs or reaching, asking to be picked up. It was very moving. Later, after touring the meagre facilities, totally inadequate for the number of children, we went to the office of the manager. I had some money in my pocket, given to me by someone who is actually sitting here today, entrusted to me to “be used where it is most needed”, and so I asked Madam Ngunjiri “What is your greatest need here?” There was no hesitation in her reply. She said: “we need people to love our children.” By that she meant “do” something, because at that point there were 140 kids below the age of 5, with only 4 adult caregivers. Four! That’s one adult for every 36 or so children. Our Kenyan Kids was born that day, (although I didn’t realize it then) when my cousin John and I topped up the donation from the caring person here, and provided enough money to bring another child-care worker on staff. We’ve added eight others since then.

We've also partnered up with several other children's homes, schools, and service organizations to help with their work to tangibly bring love to God's children in that part of God's world.

Over the years since 2005 around 40 Canadians have travelled to Kenya at their own expense (some more than once) to give and receive love, like Rita Van Spriel, whose hands are always busy knitting love into dolls and dogs. She will share her experiences with us first. She will briefly mention "Amazing Grace" a children's home, "Gathaithi OVC" - Orphans and Vulnerable Children's home and school, grandmothers who are either affected or infected with AIDS that care for their grandchildren, "Hope House" a babies' home, the Kawangware Tailoring School, and Kambui School for the Deaf. Then, Jan Murray, the Chair of Our Kenyan Kids Board here in Canada will share a few observations.

Rita Van Spriel:

I first fell in love with the Kenyan people in 2010, when our church group went to help build a school. My daughter and I helped fund our trip by selling dolls and also having them as gifts for the African children.

I was hooked and was thrilled while I got connected with OK Kids. I have a problem when people say I'm going on a missionary trip. Yes I am on a mission, but it is to share the love of God. Their faith puts mine to shame.

Margaret at Amazing Grace said each morning that they say the Lord's Prayer. The words "give us this day our daily bread" have a whole new meaning to me now.

Over the last 3 years I have seen great improvements at Gathaithi. The first year a cow had been donated but because they didn't have \$700 to build a shed it could not come. The amazing fundraising this whole community does has enabled them to have a shed and there are now 5 animals who provide enough milk with extra to sell.

When we visit the 3 groups of Grandmothers who benefit from the selenium program we marvel at how happy they are while being so poor. They send us on our way with bags of fruit which we devour, giving the rest away at our next project.

The world is full of desperate people and it is places like Hope House that give hope to the tiny ones. Little Charlie; born premature and because his mother could not pay the hospital bill, she walked away from him. A little baby girl now has hope for the future because a police officer saw the garbage bag she was in moving. What a wonderful thing to be a part of.

At Kawangware it is harder to see the improvements. Sometimes we wonder with our small budget if our money would be more helpful somewhere else. We were assured we did make a difference. We give these young people hope. How do you put a price on hope?

I had gotten a bit used to the conditions we see in Kenya but when I saw a young woman with her huge bundle of sticks on her back, I broke down and cried. How I wished I could help her carry some for the rest of her 10K walk.

We take so many things for granted but when you find a toilet in Kenya that has a seat you are very excited. When I had to use the facilities at Kambui School of the Deaf I had a problem. I do not use sign language. A small group of girls were nearby so I did my own signing. I crossed my legs and wiggled and had a look of needing help on my face. We were able to communicate. But when I stepped out of the door a large group of girls had gathered and they were all giggling and tee heeing. A lot of fun!

When I go to my craft events I am touched by so many people. There have been goose-bumps, tears and hugs as I talk about my experiences. People will say how great it is what I am doing. I feel a bit of guilt because I am the one who is being blessed. It is not about what I do but what they do for me. There are no words for that. As a little boy was counting out his change to buy a dog I explained how he was helping. Walking away I heard him tell his mom that had helped a little boy or girl eat 3 meals for a week. The seed of sharing, giving and loving was planted in that child. That is what it is all about. Changing lives in Kenya and at home, one child, one person at a time.

Jan Murray:

I was first introduced to Our Kenyan kids in the fall of 2012 when I was searching for a spot to complete a college placement.

When I accepted the invitation to travel to Kenya in January of 2013, I can honestly say I had no idea what I was about to see. My job would be to take photographs and write daily news articles that would bring the story of what I was seeing, “alive for the world”; to share my discoveries each day with those back home, and to provide as much exposure as possible for the organization. I had traveled extensively in my younger years; I had seen extreme wealth and extreme poverty. I was certain I would not see anything that would “surprise” me.

And it didn't, but it touched me in a way I was not expecting. When I arrived, our hotel (the Methodist Guest House) was pretty much what I was expecting. It did not exude wealth or poverty. It was neutral. It

was as I expected. The next day, we traveled into Kawangware, one of the less developed areas of Kenya – a slum, as some would say.

The children that I met that month were not like the children here. They had similarities of course; they ran around the school yard hooting and hollering, playing with their friends, they laughed and giggled and teased one another, much like here. What was different was their attitude. They did not take anything for granted. They had no “expectations”. They were not “entitled”.

From the time they were born, they knew that nothing was free. There were no guarantees in life. They could not be guaranteed shoes or clean clothes; there would be no guarantee of even one meal a day, let alone three. There was not even a guarantee of clean water. What struck me, was that they had no idea that any of these things “should” be guaranteed. After all, how can you expect something you’ve never had? They had no expectations, because from the day they were born, this was just the way things were. They knew no different. Things our children take for granted, without even a second thought, such as education, clothing, medical care or clean water had never been guaranteed.

Nothing was free, and nothing would be handed to them. And yet, they smiled, they laughed, they loved. To them, they had all they were supposed to have. Each day was a gift. To them, God has given them all that they need. No matter where we went, we were welcomed with open arms. Every day, each new place that we went, we were welcomed with open arms, warm embraces and treated to the best that they could provide. They would cook feasts for us and encourage us to eat and eat and eat until we were full and could absolutely eat no more! Often, this was difficult for us, as we knew that sometimes, our eating today might mean that they might not eat tomorrow. Yet they would insist, because to them, there was no fear, God would provide. Of that, they had no doubt. Their faith was unbelievably strong.

We continued to see this unending faith, day after day after day. Each new project we visited would share with us their hopes and dreams; show us all that they had accomplished over the past year and what they hoped to accomplish in the year ahead. They were always striving toward progress.

One day as I sat in my nice cozy hotel room, sipping a cold beverage and prepared to send that day’s news article and pictures; I began to look over the photos I had taken that week, and I mean really looked at them. The children wore clothes that did not always fit properly. They were ripped and dirty, often with holes or missing buttons. Not everyone had shoes on

their feet and some who did, wore shoes that were so worn out and tattered; I wondered why they bothered at all. In the background were buildings – which here would not have been called that – but they were their homes, their places of business. The walls and roofs were constructed of old, tattered sheet metal, mud and sometimes pieces of rubber and branches. There were no sidewalks, no street signs, no stop lights, and no pavement. There were no benches to rest on, any flower pots or shrubbery along the roadside. The streets were showered with litter; there were piles of garbage, some on fire, some not. I stared at them awhile and then realized that in almost every single picture, the people were smiling. They had nothing, and yet they were happy. Most had no idea where their next meal would come from, and yet they were happy.

We grew up (and continue to raise our children) in a world where so much is just taken for granted. Yes, we have poverty here as well, but even those who are poverty stricken in Canada, have shelters available to them that will provide them with a roof over their heads, a bed to sleep in, blankets to warm them, and clean water to drink. Our children are provided with free education – and despite the occasional controversy, it's a good education. We have free healthcare, so when our children are sick, we can get help for them. All of these things and more, we take for granted every single day.

In Kenya, none of the above is guaranteed. Not a roof over your head, or a bed to sleep in or covers, or even clothes, to keep you warm. Often mothers walk for miles and miles and miles to fetch water for their families, and even then, there is no guarantee that it is clean or will not make them sick. Health care is a joke. And education – even for elementary children, has fees; fees that most families cannot afford. And we all know that an education is imperative for a child to survive. All of these things that we take for granted every single day, are a challenge for our friends in Kenya.

And after all of these discoveries, after all I had seen, photographed and journaled, I was taken aside on my last day, by our guide. He took my hand and walked away, maybe 15-20 feet from the group, where no one would hear what he would say to me.

As he put his arms around me for what I thought was a warm embrace and final goodbye, he softly spoke, "Please do not tell people that we are poor."

"What," I asked him, surprised by his request.

“Please do not write that we are poor,” he reiterated. “Tell people what you have seen, but remember, we are happy. And we know that God will provide.”

This is what I encourage Our Kenyan Kids to do. They know that God will provide, and we know that he provides, through us, one day at a time, one dollar at a time, one child at a time.

Pastor Doug -

You've heard of the love that was received by Rita and Jan, and a wee bit about how we are giving back. But this is a country still where 6% of the population, male and female of all ages are infected with HIV/AIDS, with 660,000 dying annually, leaving many orphans, and family units destroyed or disrupted. Organizations and compassionate people everywhere are trying to help in situations that we cannot begin to imagine here. It can feel totally overwhelming. But love doesn't do “overwhelming” I've found.

So, I want to close with this story:

After a major storm a young boy was walking along a beach littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore, in dire danger of dying. The boy was picking up a starfish, walking to the edge of the surf and throwing it back into the water, one after another, one after another. An older man watching, leaning on his cane sceptically said to the boy: “How do you expect to make a difference when there are thousands dying on the sand?” The boy didn't miss a beat as he carried yet another starfish to the edge of the sea. As he threw the fish back into its natural habitat he said “it sure makes a difference to this one.”

And that is how God “does” God's love with us. One person at a time. And so “...for right now, as Eileen read to us earlier, we have three things to do... “Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.”

