

Scripture: Psalm 121 & Romans 12:9-13

Sermon Title: "Send Me"

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As I have shared before on occasion, I grew up in a home that did not find it easy to say "I love you" or other verbal expressions of deep emotion. Such words were especially challenging for men because we were taught, I believe primarily by example, that men did not share such emotions. It was just not acceptable for whatever reason and we knew it wasn't because it just wasn't done a whole lot. And yet, this doesn't mean that there wasn't love to be found. It was just shared in different ways. For example, I don't believe I have ever heard my father say the words "I love you" to anyone but I do know that he strived his hardest to keep our family housed and fed and in that, he expressed love. Or when he would cut some fresh lilacs from the bush outside the house and bring them into my mom without any words because he knew that lilac was and still is her favorite flower, I believe there was some love in that action and that simple gift. Or when I would see my mom gently rub my dad's back after a long, hard day as he sat watching television. Again, there were no words but I'm guessing there was love.

Each person seems to have a primary way in which they receive and express love from and to others. This was the foundation of Dr. Gary Chapman's work when he published a book in 1995 entitled "The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate". This idea of love languages has become a rather popular one among couples today and this concept of Dr. Chapman's has been one that he and others have even expanded beyond intimate relationships to many of the relationships that we share in life. It's not just about love for a partner but love for all the people with whom we journey through life. The purpose of this work by Dr. Chapman as I see it is to get folks really thinking about how they best enjoy receiving love and to get people thinking about how they like to express love ultimately in all of their relationships. According to him, if you have never heard of these 5 love languages before, they are as follows: words of affirmation (hearing "I love you" or similar spoken expressions of

feeling), quality time spend together, receiving gifts with deep thought and meaning put into the gift, acts of service (a love that is lived by what we do), and physical touch/physical contact (like holding a hand or placing your head on another's shoulder).

Now, I know that this probably seems like a rather mushy topic for our First Responders Appreciation Sunday, but I truly believe that what our First Responders do is grounded deeply in how they love those around them. It's grounded in the love that we are called to live out by our faith - a love talked about many time by Paul and we hear a bit from him today. For a love that is genuine, that shows honor to others, that is with others through the trials, that cares for the needs of strangers, this is a powerful love and one that we are called to live. One that I believe we see in the actions and service of our first responders.

To a degree, we can see many of the love languages expressed in how our first responders care. In the dispatcher who is on the phone with someone in crisis, assuring them that help is on the way, that they are not alone, and in their presence on the phone which says they will be okay, I see words of affirmation living in how they love someone through these challenging times of life. For the EMT who checks a pulse, starts an IV, and offers many such forms of healing touches or the firefighter who carries someone to safety, I see physical contact, physical touch as living in how they love the one they are caring for in the moment. I think of the small town police chief who came to my grandparent's house in 2007 to inform them that my uncle had a heart attack while driving for work and the time which that police chief spent with my grandparents as they became numb with the grief of this sudden and tragic loss of their son- he shared with them quality time, not ready to rush off but to stay with them and simply sit with them for a while in their sorrow. None seem to do it to receive gifts, but to give gifts of hope and even gifts of life. Still, with signs of each, it would seem to me that the primary love language expressed by our first responders is acts of service. To love a community and to love our neighbors through the most challenging moments of

life, by being there and serving, this is the love of a first responder. A love which can often be seen going above and beyond the call of duty.

A beloved person in my life shared with me recently part of their own experience from the past with an EMT who exemplified love in their work and service. He had been experiencing a panic attack while being transported to the local emergency room. In an effort to care for him, the EMT asked if he had any favorite childhood songs. When he responded, she began to sing it to him, over and over again, encouraging him to join in from time-to-time. What a wonderful example of the power of song! When he began to calm down, she asked if there was anything else that could be done. He said that it was too loud and it smelled funny in the ambulance. So she grabbed her own phone and headphones, given them to him so that he could listen to music and pull his focus away from the noises surrounding him as he focused on the lyrics and the rhythms. She also gave him a blanket to bring a sense of comfort. When they arrived at the hospital, she let him keep the phone and headphones until he was settled in and did her best to make sure people were giving him space so that he could remain as calm as possible. This is, I'm sure, just one of many beautiful examples of first responders loving and serving above and beyond with every action.

To some degree, we can all appreciate the aspects of each of the five love languages – this is part of Dr. Chapman's principles and understanding of love. They all have their role in our lives. And they all are important when we live out the love that we are called to live by our faith. When we look at how Jesus loved and as we strive to live following his example, we see each of these languages expressed and experienced in some way. In speaking words of hope and of God's love which affirm us of our belovedness, Jesus offered words of affirmation. In sitting, talking, and journeying with his disciples and many who came to be by his side, Jesus shared such quality time. Sure Jesus did not live to receive gifts, but when a woman came with an alabaster jar of expensive perfume to anoint him, he accepted it and the anointing of this gift. He loved through physically touching those whom society had deemed worthless, offering them healing and

wholeness, and in that touch claiming them as worthy beyond measure. And yet, above all, it would seem that his primary love language to the world would be acts of service, giving of his life for others and to care for others. And Jesus calls us to follow in this way when he tells us that we must be servants of all. In those acts of service to the world as we follow where Jesus has led, we show our love for God!

Beloved People of God, may it be our call to share the love of Jesus in all the ways that we can, with a focus on service which may just be the primary love language for God. When there is a need, may we be ready to live love and fulfill it. When our community requires us, may we do all we can to be of service. When the neighbors we know and the neighbors we never met need a lived love to touch and transform their lives, may we be willing to share it! Where God needs us to serve and breathe life into the world around us, may we be ready with a response of "Here I am! Send me!" We give thanks today for the first responders who do this every day that they serve as they boldly and bravely say "Here I am! Send me!" We know that loving in this way is not always easy and that in their work, they see and experience many difficult moments in the lives of others, still the love that they share has the potential to heal, help, and make whole once more the lives they touch. No matter how we like to show love, may we all strive to live a love with such commitment to the people around us - and may we all go above and beyond, boldly saying, "Send me!". So be it and may it be so. Amen.