



Sermon Title: What If...

1 John 3:1, 16-18, 1 John 4:7-21

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Thank you all for being here. It's great to have you. Those of you who are here in the room and those of you who are joining online, thank you. Also, welcome new hope that is joining us as well. Thank you all for being here. I think you would all agree with this statement. If every church just did what Jesus tells us to do, the world would be a better place, right?

Less racism, less poverty, lonely people would be finding community. There'd be less division and fighting, and a lot more people would know the love of Jesus that gives us courage, hope, and joy, if every church just did what Jesus told us to do. But that would be the problem, right? We don't always, and by we, I mean me, don't always do what Jesus tells us to do. Some of you may have heard me mention a church that was having a congregational meeting about Christmas decorations in the church, which some people wanted and other people didn't want.

They got into such a heated fight about it, they had to call the police to calm things down. We're having a congregational meeting today at 12:15. If you'd like to stick around, it could be really exciting. That's bad advertising for your church, right? Come to our church, get arrested. We don't always do what Jesus tells us to do, but that is no reason that we should stop trying. We're doing a sermon series about how the most important characteristic of a follower of Jesus is to be marked by His love. And a mark has two aspects to it. First, a mark is something that happens to you, right? If you get a tattoo, that's something that you experience, it happens to you. But the second aspect of a mark is it's something other people see on you or in you. So for the last five weeks, we've talked about how we experienced the overwhelming love Jesus has for you and for me.

Two weeks ago, we anointed each one of you with oil, a mark on your forehead, and we prayed for each one of you by name that you would experience Jesus's love. Last week, 30 people were baptized. Yes. You can say yes. You can... 15, 15 had signed up, 15 responded spontaneously. In the moment over the last 18 months, 270 people have been baptized or reaffirmed their baptism because they've experienced Jesus' love. You can, yes. Because they're experiencing Jesus love.

Starting today, we're going to spend the next few weeks on the second aspect of a mark, which is the mark of love that people see in us and through us and around us. We will talk about that, how we do that as individuals, we'll talk about that in the next few weeks. But today I'm going to talk about how we show Jesus love together corporately as a church. Because of all the things Jesus could have left behind, a school, a government, he left behind this community of very imperfect people who are experiencing his love more and more, and showing it to the world in a way that is drawing others to him.

That's the mission he gave to this community he called the church. Today's text is from 1 John and it says this, "See what great love the father has lavished on us." That's a big word. It doesn't say, see what great love the Father has drizzled on us, lavished on us. "That we should be called the children of God. And that's what we are." That's how much we're loved. And, or another word you could put there is "Therefore because we are so loved, we ought to lay down our lives for others. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" That's a good question, right? When we see people in poverty or elderly, people who are isolated, lonely people, people facing health crises, a visible mark of having experienced Jesus' love is that we are going to help those people.

"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and truth." And by truth it means Jesus who said he is the way, the truth and the life. That is, our helping should be both practical and it should connect people to Jesus. And BelPres that first part, practically helping people, we are really good at that. We do that wonderfully. A growth opportunity for us is the telling people about Jesus part. But fortunately we have New Hope Revival as part of our church and Chinese Covenant, and they're really good at talking about Jesus, and they can teach the rest of us how to do that. We can learn from New Hope and Chinese Covenant.

The text goes on, "This is love. Not that we love God, but that he first loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin." First we experienced Jesus love. And then, "Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." And what made complete means is that we can't see God, but when we love others, the world sees God through us.

Because how will fearful people know that Jesus love makes them brave? How will people in poverty find hope through Jesus? How will divisions and fighting in through the reconciling love of Jesus, if we don't show Jesus love to the world, who's going to tell them? Who's going to show them? That's got to be us. Not out of a legalistic obligation, but because we are experiencing his love ourselves more and more for the sake of others, but also for our own sake. Because this mission that Jesus gives us is the most life-giving, most fulfilling thing we could be a part of.

And I think we all long for something that's big enough to live for. Some of you may have heard me tell a story about a family in our church. At dinner they were talking about if they had several million dollars, what they would do to help people with all that money. And they said things like build hospitals in under-resourced countries and stuff like that. And then they asked their ten-year-old son, if you had several million dollars, how would you help people? And he said, "If I had that much money, I would end world puberty." I think he meant poverty, but he might be onto something. That might be a worthwhile vision.

But Jesus gives us a mission even bigger than that. Jesus gives us a mission even bigger than anything that we can come up with, nothing less than participate with him in the redemption of the whole world. So let me take a few minutes to talk about where God has taken us as a church, and where our elders and pastors are discerning that he's taking us in the future. And normally we do this in a separate night on a separate vision night normally is when we do this, but this year we're doing it as part of the Sunday sermon, and then we're going to have a congregational meeting today at 12:15 in the sanctuary for questions and answers, and do some budget stuff, and things like that.

So where have we been? This church was started 69 years ago in a funeral home. In case you're wondering, that's not a normal place to start a church. We want to grow. Let's meet in a funeral home, that'll pack the pews. That's a sign of life, right? But it worked, and since then we've been partnering with Jesus to help people experience his love here on the east side, as well as the places in the world he sends us.

Now in 69 years, the east side has changed a lot. It's bigger for one thing, but also now 58% identify as minority. 41% are foreign born. That's a different east side than 69 years ago. And we want to be a church that reflects our community, and slowly, in part thanks to New Hope and Chinese Covenant, slowly we are becoming more multicultural, which is a very difficult thing to do, which is why most churches don't do it. But it is so worth the doing because heaven is going to be super multicultural, so let's start practicing that now. If you don't like it here, you won't like it there.

There are also a lot of young families here on the east side, and we want to equip all of us to show Jesus love to those young families. Not because we only care about young

families. No, no, no, no, no. We care about every generation. It's just that young families is a generation that is missing in churches all across America, and often they want to be around older people who can mentor them and be stand-in grandparents to their kids. And this church has such cool and awesome senior citizens with enormous amount of life experience that younger families need to be around.

We also live in the most unchurched in the country. Fewer people know Jesus here than any place else in the United States, and a lot of people have just written the Northwest off because of that. But I believe the Northwest is worth contending for. I mean, look at this picture. I mean, look how beautiful it is here. Three days a year. Like, that's worth saving, don't you think? That's worth fighting for? We have been showing Jesus love for 69 years in lots of ways that many of you know about.

Way back in the 1960s we started a coffee house for street kids to reach out to them. We started Jubilee Reach that helps kids from under-resourced families thrive in school and escape poverty through education. In Rwanda we built the Center for Champions that so far has gotten 1,000 kids off the streets, given them job skills, and introduced them to Jesus so that they can get out of poverty. 1,000 kids. Through Jubilee Reach we are helping immigrants from Latin America and all over the world. We're also helping refugees. We were doing this back in the 70s, some people in this church actually had Cambodian refugees live in their homes with them for a while.

Now, today the refugees we're helping are from places like Afghanistan, and Iran, and Iraq, and they're becoming Christians by the thousands. Some are going back to their home countries to tell people about Jesus at the risk of imprisonment and even death. It's a once-in-a-generation movement for the gospel and almost no Western churches are involved, but we are because we want to be a part of that. To help those people experience Jesus love, but let's be clear, also for our sake. Because when you get around someone who is so excited about Jesus, they are willing to face death to tell other people about him man, that gets me out of my small tiny little world of me, and mine, and my problems, and my wants, and my entitlements, and my desires, and me, me, me, me, me, into a vision that is big enough to live for, and maybe even die for.

I need refugees way more than they need me, for the sake of my soul. Those are just a few things, just a few of the things that we're doing to help people experience Jesus love. But with Jesus there is always, always more. So what else is Jesus calling us to do in the future? Well, we've learned some things this year. We learned a lot of things this year. Way back in February we told you that we were running about a million dollars behind on our budget, and you guys stepped up. You guys were awesome. You gave, we actually ended the fiscal year in August \$1 million ahead of budget, a surplus.

So thank you so much. To those of you who gave, thank you so much, and well done. A \$2 million swing in just seven months, that's not normal. Okay, BelPres, you're abnormal. Some of you are like, "Yeah, we've noticed," but in really, really cool ways. Now, there are two really important caveats on that surplus.

First, a chunk of that surplus is because of some large one-time gifts that will not recur. They were one-time, so that's a part of that surplus. They're not coming back. Second, over the last few years we've seen this yo-yo effect where we get behind on our budget, and we let you know, and then giving picks up, and then we let you know that we're back on track, and then giving falls off again, and then we're behind again. I have not found that to be a particularly fun rollercoaster, so please don't hear, "Oh, they've got a surplus, I don't have to give."

No, because then we'll be in deficit again, and some of that surplus were those large gifts. But also we did some really cool things with that surplus. We gave half of that to our mission partners such as New Horizons to expand shelters for homeless teens in King County. Urban Impact, that one of the things they do is help people in poverty create a business plan so that they can get out of poverty by being business owners. We help build a school in Congo that brings from the different warring tribes together to get an education so they have hope in their future, for their future.

And at the same time be part of Christ-centered reconciliation programs that will bring these different tribes together so that this new generation of Congolese will end the ethnic violence there. Then we set the other half of that surplus aside for our building fund to deal with some maintenance that we've been deferring for several years because of lean budget years, but also because we know we have some opportunities with our building, one of which is we need to do some upgrades to this room to make it a little more conducive to worship, things like that. The other thing we were able to do this year because you gave is that for the first time in over 30 years, this church is completely debt-free. We owe \$0 to anybody.

And then on top of all of that, we have a legacy foundation where people leave the church in their will, and that funds things that the operating budget can't, like helping unhoused families get shelter and things like that. And they're going to be in the lobby with some cookies today, by the way, so go get a cookie.

All of that plus all the normal stuff we do of worship and kids programs, and congregational care and all that stuff. Lots of great stuff. And that \$2 million swing revealed something. That \$2 million swing in just seven months, it revealed something. There is vast capacity in this church, and not just of money, but vast capacity of time, and skills, and connections, and influence, and a great capacity of heart. BelPres, you really

care about people. And I say this all the time because I mean it, and I know I speak for the rest of the staff.

I love you. You are a wonderful church, and I'm so glad I get to be a part of it. And it is in the capacity of this church alone to significantly improve many of the problems in our region and that we see around the world. My predecessor Dick Leon would often say to me, "The great thing, Scott about BelPres is there's so much resource of money, and skills, and talents, and time, and all kinds of things. It's a bunch of thoroughbred racehorses, and if you can just get them all moving in the same direction, you can have a huge impact." And then his voice would trail off and he would wistfully say, "If you could just get them moving in the same direction," because that would be the challenge. So our elders are asking this question, what if we gave you a bigger vision than just a budget shortfall? And that mattered, so thank you. But what if we gave you a bigger vision?

Well, 14 months from now on December 10th, 2025, this church will turn 70 years old. So in light of our 70th birthday, what if 14 months from now, 70% of this church was doing what the Bible tells all of us to do, which is to give 10% of our income to the faith community we're a part of. But not just our money, but our skills, our connections, our heart. What if 70% of this church were giving 10% of those things, and we picked 70% to match the 70th anniversary, right? 70 for 70. What does Jesus want to do with that? In terms of just dollars, that would more than double our annual budget, and our elders and pastors are fasting and praying to discern how Jesus would want to use that vast capacity. And in January there's going to be a process where Presbyterian, so there will be a process, there will be a process to determine the process, actually.

In January, there's going to be a process where we're going to invite all of you to give input on what Jesus might want to do with the capacity of this church. We're going to invite you to give that input under one condition, that you commit to pray and fast about that question. Because see, here's the thing, we don't want your good ideas. I'm sure they're great ideas. I have great... My ideas are awesome ideas. We don't care. We do not want our good ideas. We want Jesus good ideas. And part of being a disciple is we discern things like that through prayer and fasting, and no decisions have been made about what we would do with that except for one. If 70% of us tithe money, time, talent, heart, here's what we would not do with that. We would not spend it all on ourselves.

We would not, for instance, massively grow the number of staff people. We have spent the last three years reducing the number of staff, and we want to keep that number low so that we can do other things. So for instance, here's just a few ideas, not decisions, just ideas to think about. We could provide affordable housing. If 70% were giving 10%, we could provide affordable housing for families that are struggling here on the east side, and for senior citizens who have been priced out of their homes. In fact, maybe we could do some mixed kind of thing where there's senior citizens and families so our older people are not left isolated, they're in contact with younger people. We could provide

affordable housing for refugees, but not just housing. We could expand what we are already doing, which is forming good neighbor teams who is welcoming refugees to our region, helping them get resettled, becoming friends with them, their kids become friends with the other kids, and it creates this community.

Because it's not just about money, it's about relationships, and that expands our hearts and makes our world bigger, and helps us become more like Jesus. As you've heard me say before, God does not use us to get ministry done, he uses ministry to get us done. This is about getting us done, about being more of his disciples who experienced more of his courage, faith, hope, and joy, and love. Money could build housing, but we could also leverage our connections with people who maybe have own a house that they would be willing to rent for under market. We could open up our hearts by letting some refugees live with us for a season, as some people in this church did in the 70s with Cambodian refugees.

Also, another need that we know that we have around here as we listen to city officials, affordable childcare. We could help provide affordable childcare for families who really need that, and that would be a way also for them to get to know Jesus. Another idea, you know I said earlier, we know we have some building opportunities, some building needs coming up. This lower campus is 30 years old, and every once in a while you need to remodel some things because needs change. And the normal way churches do that is you have this thing called the capital campaign, and everyone promises to give extra and over and above for a couple of years. And then you do cheesy things like you have a giant thermometer in the lobby that has all the different goal numbers, amounts, and you have the victory goal, and the hallelujah goal, and the praise Jesus goal. Okay, we don't want to do that because it's stupid and it's cheesy, right?

If 70% of us were giving 10%, we just write that check from the operating budget, no capital campaign, no debt. Those are just a few ideas, not decisions, but ideas of things Jesus could do through us. Now, you may be thinking right now, "Okay, all this sounds great. What's that got to do with me? I just want to come to church here. I just want to come to church and hear some music that is good and moving, and a sermon that hopefully encourages me." And those are great things, and we're going to do our best to keep providing those things, because those things really matter. It's just that Jesus always wants more for us than we want for ourselves. Jesus wants us to experience, for instance, the joy of hearing all the bad news in the world and the joy of being able to think, "I am so glad that I am part of making these things better through my church, in the name of Jesus."

He wants us to experience the even bigger joy of seeing him do what seems to be impossible. Because when we stretch beyond what we think is possible in our own capacity, we see what Jesus can do in his. We got an email from one of our partners in Greece that this church supports that's helping Muslim refugees in practical ways get

resettled, food, clothing, things like that. Her name is Vula, and in her email she told us about this man that showed up on their doorstep. He was from Iran and he'd been living in a refugee camp, and he was really depressed for a number of reasons, one of which was he'd broken his leg in an accident and the hospital had put a cast on it, but the bones were misplaced so his leg didn't heal properly. And so now they were going to have to break his leg again and reset it again to make it work right. And he was already in a lot of pain, and he was waiting for this second operation.

So Vula said, "Would you like us to pray? But I need to warn you. I'm going to pray in the name of Jesus. Are you okay with that?" And he said, "Sure." So they prayed for him, about a dozen people prayed for him. A few days later he came back to their ministry and he was in the lobby, and he noticed Vula and he started moving his leg back and forth, and he smiled at her. He was trying to get her attention. He said, "See, I'm no longer in pain. And now I can walk, and my leg is healed. Jesus is a great healer." His leg was healed through prayer, but also his heart. He's not depressed anymore, and he's being introduced to Jesus who loved him enough to die for him.

See, that's the kind of thing that happens when we step out of our comfort zone to fulfill Jesus' mission. We experience him in really big ways, and we all long for that, and we all need that. Almost all of my highlight moments in life, almost all of my highlight moments of deep connection to others, and satisfaction, and joy, and meaning, and purpose, and just pure adrenaline have come through participating with Jesus in his rescue mission to this world. And no promotion, accolade, amount of money or exotic vacation can compare to that joy. And I am greedy for more. And our pastors and elders want more of that for all of us.

So today, I mean just the action step for today, just start to pray, and maybe even fast. How would God want to use you, and how do you think God might want to use the vast capacity of this church to make a difference and to bring his kingdom here and around the world?

Just pray about that for now. In Jesus' first sermon he quotes from the prophet Isaiah and he says, "The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." That is our mission, BelPres. And there is nothing so dangerous to the devil's plans as a church that is fully yielded to Jesus Christ. That makes the devil tremble.

So BelPres, the spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us. We literally did that two weeks ago, to preach good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at Liberty those who are oppressed, and to show the powerful, relentless, never-ending, overwhelming, making

new of all things, love of Jesus Christ, until the earth is full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the seas.

Amen. Jesus, thank you so much that you love us enough to call us out of ourselves into your bigger world, and into your bigger heart, and into your bigger kingdom. So Jesus, lead us, guide us. You have not assembled all these wonderful people and all these wonderful resources here just to posture and pose, but to change the world in your name. So Jesus, help us hear your call. Help us hear the love that is in your call, that you love us enough that you want to give us a really great ride of seeing what you can do. So Lord, help us to hear that not as obligation, but your great love for us to call us into something big enough to live for. We ask this in your name, Jesus, Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What is this passage's definition of love? How is it different than our culture's understanding of love?
- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What are some of the best examples you can think of loving "with actions and with truth"? (1 John 3:18)
- How do you feel God calling you to love sacrificially this week with your family or friend or difficult person or in politics, at church, in your finances, a person in need, etc.?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.