

10 days from Today. Do you know what day that will be? One of you will say, that would be a Wednesday. Another of you would say, That would be Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Still another, that would be Valentines Day. Even though my wife is not big on cards for a day like Valentines day, I know it would be a good idea for me to get her a card. Don't want to be in the doghouse.

So how do you express love to someone, who is your spouse, or maybe your grandchild, or maybe your child. You would let them know in someway the sacrifices you would make for them, just so they knew you loved them. Maybe I would say something like, "I would climb the highest mountain . . . I would swim the deepest ocean . . . I would cross alligator-infested rivers . . . I would cross the most scorched desert . . . with no shoes on my feet . . . if you will be mine." One thing I've learned after 35 years of marriage, is when you do things around the house that need to be done, and you weren't ask to do them. That scores points. My wife loves that. Or when I give up church work, to drive with her to Shand's hospital. Give up something I want to do, for her. She says, words are cheap.

When it comes to communicating your love for someone, how will you do it? What steps will you take to show that special someone how important they are to you? The answer is simple: You will do whatever it takes.

Friends, you and I are witnesses to a love story. It's the story of a love so high, so deep, so wide, so broad, that it transcends human understanding. It's the story of God's love for sinful human beings, the love of our heavenly Father that desires that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. It's the story of God's love so intense that he did not spare his only Son, but gave him up on the cross to pay for the sins of the world.

You and I are witnesses to the love of God. Now, when it comes to communicating that love to the world around us and touching lives with the gospel of Jesus Christ, how are we going to do it? What steps will we take to get the message out of God's eternal love and touch lives with the powerful message of the gospel? For the Christian there is only one answer: By the power and grace of God, we will do whatever it takes.

That's the message that St. Paul wants to communicate with us this morning in his 1st letter to the Corinthian Christians. He describes his efforts to do whatever it took to share the word of God with people around him. He says, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many s possible."

Do you understand what Paul is saying there? Even though he had rights and freedoms as a citizen, he willfully chose not to exercise those rights but instead submitted himself and made himself subject to the people around him, so that he could meet people where they are at and relate to them in their lives. St Paul writes, "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law."

Do you grasp what it meant for Paul to “become like a Jew?” It meant putting aside his Christian liberty and submitting to the Jewish legal requirements about what you could eat and when you could work and all the rituals you had to follow and whom you could and could not associate with. He submitted himself to the requirements of that Jewish law so that he could mingle with the Jewish community and relate to Jews where they were at in life.

“To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law.” Do you realize what it meant for Paul to step into the shoes of all the Gentiles around him? The saying goes, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. It meant that wherever Paul went, whether it was to Athens or to Corinth or to Philippi or to Jerusalem, he would accommodate himself to the customs and way of life wherever he was. He wouldn’t break God’s commandments though.

If you think that was an easy task, let me remind you it would be like you going to a market in China and saying, “I want that dog carcass there to eat,” because that’s what they eat in China. Or going down to Hy-Vee and selecting a nice round of horse steak, because that’s the local delicacy. All of this adapting Paul did because he wanted to reach people where they were at with the gospel. Paul says, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” How did Paul strive to reach out with Christ’s message? His philosophy was: Whatever it takes.

Years ago, I was the chaplain at the Berkshire County House of Correction. I conducted 3 worship services there every Sunday for about 20 inmates at each service. After the services, I would wander the cellblocks visiting with inmates. There was one section of the jail for people getting ready to be released. They had a few extra perks there, like the ability to make instant coffee. One day, I was visiting Bobbie Voghel. He had committed felonies in his lifetime, assault charges, but now was getting ready to be released. I had an opportunity to talk with him about Jesus. He asked me if I wanted a cup of coffee. I said sure. He came back with a coffee in a Styrofoam cup with ball point pen drawings on the cup. The cup had been used many times before he gave it to me. What to do? These guys have diseases. I drank the coffee, and talked to him about Jesus. Later in the day, my wife threatened never to kiss me again, but let me tell you, it was worth the risk, to share the Gospel. Do Whatever it takes. Have a passion to win souls for Christ.

Why would a well educated, middle-class man like the Paul leave his comfortable life and go cavorting around the Greco-Roman world sharing the gospel? He gives us the answer in his second letter to the Corinthians. There in chapter five he says, “For Christ’s love compels us, for we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised to life.”

Paul knew that life is a dangerous proposition. You only go around once in life, and then you die and face the judgment. I still remember leaving a catechism class at Trinity Lutheran Church in Bay City, Michigan, and one of the teachers, Mr. Abraham, asking me to come into his room and watch what was happening on the TV. I saw an airplane crashing into the World Trade Center. 2996 people lost their lives that day. How suddenly and how unexpectedly life can come to an end; and when the end comes you are before the judgment seat of God. There are only two types of people before the judgment seat of God: those who have been led by the Holy Spirit to repent of their sins and to trust Jesus for complete forgiveness, and those who have not heard or have not believed in our only Savior from sin. To reach those people with the saving truth of God's love story in Christ, is it worth doing whatever it takes?

You see, my friends, we can't just sit back and wait for people to come to hear about Jesus. We want to roll up our sleeves and go to work to reach people where they're at. That means removing the stumbling blocks we put up that hinder the Gospel, stumbling blocks like our own preconceived notions of who is worthy of the Gospel and who is not. It means getting up the courage to invite our friends who have no church home, to come to Friendship Sunday at Open Bible on February 11th. It means digging deep into our pockets to give a little more of our treasure back to God so that new missions can be opened. It means taking time out of our schedule to share Bible stories with our children, grandchildren, or great grandchildren, so that they also become witnesses to the love story of God in Christ Jesus. It means doing whatever it takes.

Just look at what God did for you and me to get the job done. Our heavenly Father asked Jesus in eternity, "What will you do to complete the salvation of the world?" And Jesus' answer was simply, "Whatever it takes." Crossing the scorching desert? Jesus did that. He spent hungry days in the wilderness contending with Satan. He knew thirst and poverty. He climbed the highest mountain. It wasn't Everest. It was Calvary. He made his way up the mountain carrying on his back the cross of our shame, loaded down with our guilt, burdened with our sins. He bore our sins of lovelessness; he carried our appetites for material things; he shouldered our apathy. And there on the cross, suspended between heaven and earth, he uttered the cry, "It is finished!" The guilt was removed. The sin was paid for. We are forgiven. The cost was the innocent life of our Savior and the innocent blood that poured from his wounds. That's what it took to complete the world's salvation.

God hasn't made you an apostle to go to the Gentiles. But he has made you—every one of you—a witness to a love story. You have seen and experienced the love of God for sinful human beings revealed to you in Jesus Christ your Savior. Now there remains but one simple question: How will you communicate that precious love to the people around you? For the Christian there is only one answer: By the power and grace of God, we will do whatever it takes. Amen.