

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, May 10, 2026
"The Promise"

Young at Heart Message

Most of us are familiar with the traditional ways that people handle saying the words, "I love you."

Usually, one person will say "I love you," and the other person will respond, "I love you, too."

It's a very familiar and routine response.

In fact, it can become so automatic and routine that we don't put much thought into it most of the time. Someone says, "I love you," and we automatically say, "I love you, too."

It can be so automatic for some of us that we become accustomed to saying "I love you" every time we do certain things, like leave the house, for example.

I remember once when I was a kid that I had gotten a ride home from one of my friends from basketball practice.

As I got out of the car, I said, "bye, love you!" without thinking. It was such an automatic, routine thing for me to say to my parents as I got out of the car that my brain ended up saying it to my friend and their parents.

Of course, I was embarrassed at the time, but it speaks to our tendency to allow the words "I love you" to become ordinary and routine.

But, I wonder what would happen if, instead of automatically saying "I love you" and "I love you, too," when one person says "I love you," we responded with "why?" Or, "what are your reasons?"

First of all, it would give us pause to think, wouldn't it? If I said "I love you" at the end of a phone call with my mom and she said, "why?," I would be thrown off, for sure.

Of course I have lots of reasons that I love my mom, but I rarely, if ever, articulate them to her.

In fact, recently my mom was telling me something and I said something along the lines of, "you are amazing and you deserve it."

She stopped abruptly and said, “wow, thank you so much, that’s a really nice thing to say.”

It made me realize just how infrequently I actually tell my mom *why* I love her, or that I think she’s an incredible person.

In some ways, our automatic “I love you,” and “I love you, too” responses don’t *actually* always convey our love very well.

Asking, “what are your reasons” forces someone to think about what they are saying while they are saying it, and challenges them to make the “why” of their love more concrete.

The assurance that comes with being loved and knowing that there are *reasons* for it has the power to breathe new life into a person. It can sustain and uplift us through even the worst of times.

In many ways, telling a person *specifically* what reasons we have for loving them can be far more meaningful than just saying the words “I love you.”

And, demonstrating that love in physical ways can also be deeply meaningful for people.

If you haven’t told someone in a while (or ever) *why* you love them, it would be worth trying. They may be surprised at first, but how might our worlds change if we began offering more specific expressions of our love?

The Message

Jesus is very aware of the human need for more than a simple “I love you, too.”

When Jesus tells us he loves us, we ask for concreteness. We want reasons. We want demonstrations. (Well, the disciples say what we would all be thinking on our behalf.)

When Phillip said last week, “If you show us the Father, we will be satisfied,” we said it right along with him.

We don’t ask for these demonstrations or reasons because we are faithless. We ask because we are human. Phillip asks on behalf of all humanity.

Jesus giving us more – reasons and demonstrations instead of just words – helps us feel more secure and stable in times of anxiety and uncertainty.

If he wanted to, Jesus could get frustrated with this insistence on wanting more from him. Especially because he has already given us so much.

However, Jesus knows that getting frustrated would not be helpful. A different approach is needed.

Last week, we heard the first half of John 14, in which Jesus calls us to have faith and to believe in God and in him.

Today, in the second half of John 14, Jesus tells us just how much we are loved.

Actually, he doesn't just tell us. He shows us. He makes that love concrete.

He makes a promise that there is not a need to worry or be anxious, because an Advocate – a Helper or Comforter – is coming.

The Spirit certainly brings help and comfort, but the idea here is slightly different.

The Advocate defends us, stands by us, and makes a case for us before others. Not just now, but forever.

Jesus is basically providing proof of his love.

If we demand reasons – if Jesus says “I love you” and we respond with “what are your reasons,” he provides them now.

Jesus basically says, “you want me to show you? OK, I'll show you.”

How about an Advocate who will be with you always? How about an empty tomb that announces across time that not even death can stop the plans and purposes of God?

Is that enough for you?

God gives us reasons to love and works to teach us how to love. One of the ways God does that is through Jesus, who *demonstrates* for us how to love.

Deep relationships are built on trust and reciprocity.

A new friend will tell us what we want to hear. A best friend will tell us what we need to hear.

Jesus demonstrates this reciprocity, but he wants more than a simple “I love you, too” in response.

We can't hear Jesus say "I love you," and then respond by saying "why?" but then expect that when we say "I love you" to Jesus, that he wouldn't also respond with "what are your reasons?"

At the beginning of today's scripture Jesus says, "If you love me, you will do as I command."

And, at the end of the passage, he reiterates, "If you love me, you will do what I have said, and my Father will love you. I will also love you and show you what I am like."

Jesus is setting the expectation for us that he will demonstrate his love for us, but he expects it to be a two-way street. We must also demonstrate our love for Jesus.

And, one of the ways we can do that is by demonstrating Jesus's love to others.

Jesus isn't necessarily asking us to sit back and be admirers. Admirers stand in awe and appreciation, but do not take any action.

Disciples, on the other hand, follow in love and obedience.

Jesus is saying, "so, you say you love me? *Show me.*"

Just like we say to Jesus. Show us.

The relationship is mutual. There is give and take on both sides. Jesus loves us and is willing to show us.

He also wants us to show him that we love him.

How do we make good on this promise, then? Certainly, we can receive the Advocate – the Holy Spirit – with grace and appreciation for the magnitude of the gift.

But, I think more importantly, we can use that gift to do good in the world.

In our first reading today, 1 Peter 3 says, "Even if you have to suffer for doing good things, God will bless you... You are better off to obey God and suffer for doing right than to suffer for doing wrong."

Jesus demonstrates his love for us, and wants us to do good in the world. We cannot control how other people respond to us.

Nor can we control the less-than-good things that others do in and to the world.

But we can control what we do. We can accept Jesus's love with grace and then extend that love outward toward others.

Even if others do not respond in the way we might expect. We cannot control other people.

We can only manage our own responses to the world.

So, may you receive Jesus's gifts – his demonstrations of love for you – and may you recognize those demonstrations as proof of his love.

May you use those gifts in your own life to do good in your world – in whatever ways you are capable of and comfortable with.

And, may you know, without question, that you are loved and cared for so deeply that you do not even need to ask why Jesus loves you. Amen.

Let us pray:

God of all time and space, you initiated the relationship of love and generosity with creation at a time before and beyond all knowing. Through the Word and the Spirit, you continue in eternal love for all beings. Fill us with a deep and abiding awareness of your presence, your call, and your grace in our lives and in our world. Shape us to into the people you have made us to be – poured out in creative mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ in all creation. Amen.