Jesus Loves Even Me

**Introduction:**

Well good morning, Maitland River Community Church! It is a pleasure and a gift to be here with you today. When I was talking with Stephen Vanderklippe about today, he asked that I prepare a message that would work for your advent series. Today we are going to focus on how the Love and Kindness of Jesus appeared. We are going to look at a text that is not typically used for Christmas. The scripture we will read this morning is Titus 3:1-8. Before we get into it let’s pray.

**Hook**

One of my favourite movies growing up was the Pirates of the Caribbean. It was a fun series of movies that focus on a few characters including the daughter of a wealthy British governor named Elizabeth, a poor iron worker named William and, as the title suggests, a pirate named Jack. Recently I read an article about this series that suggested that it may have better love stories than some famous love stories like P.S. I love you or the Notebook.

I am not sure if that’s true, but what the movie does display is the power of love and desire. In the first movie there is a love story between Elizabeth and William. Even though Elizabeth is betrothed to a wealthy British statesman, she develops feelings for William as well. Unfortunately, Elizabeth gets captured by pirates and as result William partners with Jack, a pirate, to save her. Unfortunately, Jack’s motivation is not pure. He wants to get the pirate ship used to capture Elizabeth. Jack wants the famous Black Pearl pirate ship to be his.

To accomplish this task, Jack has in his possession a compass that points to the holder’s true desires and he and uses it to guide him to the pirate ship he so desperately wants.

In this passage we are going to look at love and desires and consider how our hearts are sometimes guided by a faulty compass and how God has graciously and loving provided a solution to our brokenness.

**Background**

To gain a greater understanding of the passage it is important to understand a few things about it. First the book of Titus is part of what we call the Pastoral Epistles. These letters include 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. They are letters written by Paul to those whom he has mentored into pastoral ministry. Here Paul writes to Titus who is the pastor in Crete. Paul stayed there briefly, but he moved on leaving Titus in charge. The thing you need to know about Crete is that it is… well… unruly. One of their own esteemed prophets and leaders said that “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons.” To make matters worse, this fledgling church lacked elders and leaders and it was experiencing strife and division over a variety of issues. With these things in mind let’s read the text. I will be reading from the NIV 2011 version.

**Text (Titus 3:1-8, NIV)**

1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. 8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

1. Trouble in the Text- Without Jesus, All People are Depraved

One of the first things we notice in this passage is the command to obey all those in authority which includes the emperor and other leaders at lower levels. If Cretans are what they seem to be, it would be no surprise to many that they struggled to listen to authorities. Paul really wants Christians to represent God well in the public sphere. Civic obedience is one of the ways Cretan Christians can model their faith well to those outside of the church. However, it goes without saying that Paul does not want Christians to obey the authorities to a point where it causes them to sin, he simply wants them to model good community-oriented behavior.

More than civil obedience alone, Paul wants Titus to make it clear that Christians should behave in ways that are winsome or attractive. They should avoid putting people down with their words and gossiping. They should be considerate and gentle. Paul is painting a picture of a person who is peaceable and selfless. Someone who is in control of their behavior and their words. Someone who does things to support and encourage others.

Some of the underlying reasons Paul is encouraging Titus to teach these things are because he sensed that there was some unhealthy division and comparison occurring. A group called Judaizers, these are people who believed Christians of all stripes should follow all Old Testament laws and rituals including circumcision, were looking down at Gentile or non-Jewish Christians for their behavior. Also, collectively there were people in the church who looked down on non-Christian people because of how poorly they behaved morally.

Paul uses this opportunity to make a point to Titus in case he too was getting on his high horse. He says something like: “Look without Jesus, we too would, or have, behaved in all sorts of evil ways, just like the Cretans. We would have been wandering around like lost puppies completely unaware of how broken our lives are. We too pursue immediate pleasure in unhealthy ways to satisfying the never-ending craving for something more, we too would behave in ways that are not kind to other people.

Paul is making it clear that human beings, left to their own devices, are all evil and depraved and do all sorts of evil just like the Cretans were known for. Paul is telling Titus that we humans all need to be rescued.

1. Trouble in Life- Our True Colours

Whenever I think about the Island of Crete I think about the Island of Tortuga. Tortuga is a pirate haven that was heavily defended in the Caribbean. It allowed pirates the freedom to be on land without colonial interference. In the Pirates of the Caribbean movies, it was an island that allowed for all kind of moral depravity and poor behavior. It is depicted as a place where people engage in all sorting of drinking, partying, and sexual behavior. Here pirates can spend their stolen treasure in ways they deem fit.

At this point, you may be wondering how an Island of pirates can function without bloodshed and chaos, well the pirate lords did abide by a certain code of ethics that allowed some sense of relative safety.

What is fascinating about the Pirates of the Caribbean movies is that you often find yourself rooting for the pirates over the colonial powers of Britain, France, or Spain. You want to see the pirates win because you see some of the selfishness, brokenness, and egotistical behavior displayed by the stuffy aristocrats and governors of these empires.

The reality is that most of us can identify with these two camps, the pirates and the colonialists or the Cretans and the heavily religious. Either camp has the ability to live in ways that do not line up with God’s expectations. We can be selfish, distracted by life’s pleasures, seeking comfort and guidance from all the wrong things and places, and we can be horribly mean and cruel to other people.

Maybe like some of the Christians in Crete, we are really religious, and we look down on people who behave like Cretans. We think we are better than those non-Christians. We make this us vs them divide and we believe that we behave so much better and do not do the silly things **Those** people do.

The problem is that even though we may look like we have it all together and even though Jesus has done a work in our lives and provided guidance, without the Holy Spirit and his constant work, we would be just as bad as anybody. We have no reason to look down on others.

As Romans 3:23 makes clear: “All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.”

We, just like anyone else, are desperately in need of an external source of love and power that will enable us to live good and productive lives; lives focused on the right things.

1. Grace in the Text- God’s Love and Kindness

Thankfully, humanity is not left to its sinful tendencies. Verses 4-8 spell out how God makes a way for people to live as he intends. To live in way that is lifegiving.

At this point, you may be asking yourself how this sermon has anything to do with Love and the advent season. Here it is: Verse 4 says that **“the kindness and love of God our savior appeared.”** The word **“appeared”** has an underlying meaning. The Greek word for appear is epiphaino (which we get our English word epiphany from)whichcan mean “shine in a dark place” or “to become manifest or gloriously visible” Paul is referring to Jesus’ coming to Earth as a baby when he talks about his appearing. Paul is talking about the Christmas event of God appearing as the light of the world.

Paul also talks about how God’s **love and kindness** appeared in the person of Jesus. This is a profound comparison Paul is making. He compares the human tendencies to hate, slander and pursue pleasure to the love and kindness of God. This is made even clearer when we understand which Greek word for love Paul is using. Here he uses the word *philanthropia* (which get the English word philanthropy from) which means love of humankind, benevolence, or as one commentator suggests, it means to show gracious or humane treatment.

Here we hear about a perfect, transcendent, immortal, and all-powerful God stepping into the mess of human life in the form of a helpless infant out of love for his people. We hear about how God chooses to step brightly into the dark, muddy, sinful mess of human depravity and brokenness out of a gracious and benevolent love for his people. Paul is saying God loves **even** these Cretans and came down to Earth for people just like them.

What’s more, during his time on Earth, Jesus saves his people and Paul makes it clear that Jesus does this saving work out of sheer mercy and graciousness, not because humans have earned his favor.

In this passage, Paul talks about the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36:25-27 in which God promises to cleanse his people of their impurities, put a new heart in them, and pour out his spirit on them because they were hopelessly sinful and broken without God’s intervention.

Paul says that God has fulfilled his Old Testament promises in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Christmas miracle of God entering human reality through a baby is completely linked to his work in Easter and Pentecost. Paul points out that even sinful Cretans have hope because the Jesus has removed their sin by his blood, he has put his Spirit in them, thereby enabling them to live holy lives.

By doing this work out of love for his people, Jesus has also provided hope. A hope in eternal life and in the fact that these people are heirs to the kingdom of God and all the treasure that entails. **Jesus did all that out of a love for his people.**

However, Paul, in this letter, was very intentional about connecting God’s love and kindness to the love the people in Titus’s church ought to have for others, even if they are Cretans. Paul is making clear that, through no work of their own believers in Crete have been saved by the love of Jesus. As a result, they must be stirred on by their hope in him and their status as members of the kingdom of heaven to love people who were lost just like them.

The Cretan Christians are called to be conduits of God’s love to the broken people around them.

1. Grace in Life- Love Personified

In the first Pirates of the Caribbean movie, we are swept off our feet by the love Will has for Elizabeth. He enters the rough and tumble world of pirates because he desperately wants to save Elizabeth. This love is starkly compared to Pirate Jack’s love for the pirate ship the Black Pearl. In our minds Will’s compass is much more rightly focused than the actual compass Jack is using to find the Black Pearl. However, in both cases, the compass is broken and as the series continues, it led Will and Jack to search for fulfillment in a variety of hopeless causes.

When we humans are left to our own devices, we will inevitably pursue worldly things and worship a variety of Idols and worthless treasures. We are not very good at finding real and true treasure. We are not very good at finding perfect and holy love. Our compasses are broken without the repairing work of the Holy Spirit.

That is the beauty of Christmas. Love came down. As Romans 5:8 says: “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” While were still sinners God’s love and kindness appeared in the form of a helpless baby. God’s compass is set on us. The object of His affection and love is us. And, because of his love and kindness, we are redeemed and made holy. Our compasses are repaired, and we are enabled to find treasure in the kingdom of heaven.

One of the ways we find treasure in the kingdom of heaven, is to be a part of its expansion. We have not been exposed to the love of Jesus and saved for heaven only. We have experienced the love of Jesus so that God can use us, as helpless as we were on our own, we are now empowered by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate his love to all the broken people in our world. Love has given way to purpose!

Unfortunately, even as Christians, we still live in broken sinful bodies, not yet fully made new. As a result, sometimes we are not motivated by the love of God and our compass needs to be adjusted and fixed. Sometimes we slip into the old self and our love for God and others wanes.

Whether you are here and identify as a Christian or you’re here you are struggling to believe God is real, I want you to look inward. Is your heart guided by a broken compass? Do you find yourself pursuing pleasure? Do you find yourself lost and aimless in this world? Lastly are you guilty of hating and slandering others?

God’s love is available to you and to me.

He calls us to embrace our kingdom identity and not our Cretan or overly legalistic identity. He loves the worst of sinners. That means he loves us no matter what we have done, no matter what our evil desires have led us to do, he loves you and me and offers us his son as a demonstration of that love.

If God is speaking to your heart right now and you are wrestling with him, ask Him to demonstrate his love to you here and now. Ask him to make fresh in your heart the power of his appearing.

May this Christmas season help to remind us that no matter how broken we are, no matter how twisted our compass, God loves you and me and out of that love he offers us the chance to share it with the world and to build the kingdom of heaven. It is in God’s Kingdom that we find true treasure and purpose.

Pray with me.

**Blessing**

**May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.**

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