**SERMON:**

**Apparently, there is an element of truth in this story.**

A plane landed after a long flight.

The flight attendant explained that there was enough time for everyone to get off the aircraft and then reboard in 50 minutes.

Everybody got off the plane except one gentleman.

The pilot had noticed him as he walked by.

He could tell that the man was blind because his guide dog lay quietly underneath the seat next to him.

“Sir”, the pilot said to the blind man, “we will be here for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?”

The blind man replied, “No thanks, but perhaps my dog would like to stretch **his** legs.”

Picture this: All the people in the gate area came to a complete stand-still when they looked up and saw the pilot **walk off the plane with a guide dog!**

The pilot was even wearing sunglasses.

**Fear took control.** People scattered and queued at the airline desk trying to change planes!

Fear is a normal human response. It’s a part of every person’s life - perhaps more so in some people than others. But still everyone has to deal with fear at some time.

But what about LOVE?

How do you know that someone loves you?

One way is to hear that person say, "I love you."

That isn't completely reliable, of course, because fakes and phonies know how to use **"I love you"** to manipulate and control.  But hearing "I love you" is a nice start.

Perhaps way of knowing that someone loves you is to see how they act in your presence.

* Do they seem glad to see you?
* Are they kind and gentle?
* Do they say things that make you feel better?
* Or things that make you feel worse?

Another way of knowing that someone loves us is by watching to see what they do to make our life better.

My father wasn't good about saying encouraging words.

I don't know that I ever heard him say, **"I love you"** or

**"Well done!"**  But he **did** get up and go to work every day.  He did what he could to ensure that we had a roof over our heads and food on the table.  Perhaps he could have done better - but he could have certainly done worse.

The ladies here might know that their husband loves them because he brings home flowers - or a nice card.

What if he were to write you a love poem?

Wouldn't that be amazing!  How about this poem:

**How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.**

**I love thee to the depth and breadth and height**

**my soul can reach, when feeling out of sight**

**for the ends of Being and ideal Grace.**

**I love thee to the level of every day’s**

**Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.**

**I love thee freely, as men strive for Right.**

**I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.**

**I love thee with the passion put to use,**

**in my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.**

**I love thee with a love I seemed to lose**

**with my lost saints! - I love thee with the breath,**

**Smiles, tears, of all my life! - and, if God choose,**

**I shall but love thee better after death.**

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a husband who writes a poem like that for you!

Perhaps you would fall down in astonishment if he did!!

But **"How do I love thee?"** wasn't written by a man.

It was written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning for her husband, Robert.

So, if you want a beautiful love poem, perhaps you'll just have to write one yourself.

How would Jesus know that someone loves him?

Jesus wanted his disciples to know the answer to that question, so he told them.

This is what Jesus said.  This is the standard by which Jesus determines whether we love him.  He says:

**"If you love me,**

**you will keep my commandments”.**

That's sweet and simple, isn't it!

**"If you love me,**

**you will keep my commandments."**

So what did Jesus command us to do?

There were several things, but the big one in the Gospel of John is this.  Jesus said:

**"A new commandment I give unto you,**

**that you love one another,**

**just as I have loved you;**

**that you also love one another.**

**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,**

**if you have love for one another"**

The love that Jesus commanded was ***agape***love.

The New Testament was written in Greek, and ***agape*** is the word that is translated - love.

***Agape*** isn't some sort of sentimental feeling, which is the way that we often think of love.   ***Agape***is love in action - that acts in loving ways toward the other person - regardless of our feelings.

Jesus wasn't just telling us to feel warm and fuzzy feelings for each other.

He was telling us to act in loving ways toward each other.

He was telling us to encourage each other - to help each other - **to take care of each other.**

When Jesus gave this commandment, he was talking to his disciples.  He was telling them to love each other.

 Each disciple was to love the other disciples.

When we apply this commandment to ourselves, Jesus is commanding us to love the other Christians around us.

* He was telling me to love you.
* He was telling you to love me.
* He was telling you to love the person sitting next to you in the pew.
* He was telling you to love the person on your committee who never shuts up.
* He was telling conservatives to love liberals and vice versa.
* He was telling us to love our Christian brothers and sisters in Uganda - and China - and Kathmandu.

And then he tells us why loving each other is so important.  He says:

**"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,**

**if you have *agape*love for one another."**

He was saying that we can give people a glimpse of **God's love** when they see us loving **each other** - helping each other - taking care of each other.

And when people see us loving one another, they will want join us, because they, **too**, want to be loved.

Our love for each other will draw people to us - and to Christ.

It isn't always easy to love one another.

In every church, there will be people we don't like very well, people with whom we disagree - people who talk too much - people who never help.

The church is made up of sinners, and it isn't easy to love sinners - but that's what Jesus asked us to do.

Jesus wants us to love one another - to act in loving ways toward each other even when we don't like each other all that well.  He wants us to love each other, because that will help to grow the kingdom of God.

In her book, *God in the Dark*, Luci Shaw tells of standing at her window and looking west on a wintry Saturday afternoon.  The sun was low on the horizon, and snow covered the ground.  Then a strong wind came up and started blowing the loose snow.  She says:

**The snow "made the wind visible in a curiously beautiful way, like a fast-moving river of light,**

**with the snow dust catching and holding**

**the glints from the sun."**

  We can't see the wind, but we can see its effects.  We can see wind move the limbs of trees.  We can see wind catch a flag and hold it out straight.  The moving limbs of trees aren't wind and don't look like wind, but we know that the wind is moving them.

But the snow dust, glinting in the sun and caught up in the wind, is different.

When we see the snow dust caught up in the wind - moving with the wind - we are suddenly privileged to see something of the wind itself - to see its shape - to see its swirls - its ups and downs.  The snow dust, at least for a moment, makes the **invisible** visible - gives us a glimpse of something that we are not usually privileged to see.

Then Luci Shaw took that image of the snow dust in the wind and made something even more wonderful of it.

She said that God is made visible in the lives of people.

 She says:

**"God shines on them**

**and shows us in their lives**

**the way the wind is blowing."**

And so Jesus says,

**“Do not be afraid.”**

**"A new commandment I give unto you,**

**that you love one another.**

**Just as I have loved you,**

**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,**

**if you have love for one another."**

If we can bring ourselves to love each other - to help each other - to take care of each other,

our lives will be like snowflakes illuminated by the light of God - moving toward the kingdom –

helping people to see God living in us –

drawing them to us - and to Our Lord.

**AMEN**