

From Us With love John 1:12-13 12/21/03

On behalf of all of those who are part of the church staff I want to thank all of you for your kindness and thoughtfulness the last weeks. The abundance of food, the kind cards, the beautiful family pictures and the words of affirmation and encouragement have been at times overwhelming. What goes on through out the year has been multiplied many times over during this celebration season. I have been thinking all month what it is that I could give to you as a gift from us to you that would be most meaningful and treasured. Something that you could really use and that might meet a real need either right now or in the immediate future. Something that you might not even be aware that you are going to need in the coming days but to receive now will make you well prepared for the future. I realize that it has to be a one size fits all and yet able to shape itself to surround a great variety of needs and circumstances. And it has to have staying power. It must be something that will travel well despite perhaps trying circumstances. And so I have a little gift here to represent what all of us would like to give you today. And I am even going to open it in front of you all. So here goes. From Dan, Lane, Phyllis, John, Susie, Perri, Britta, Martha, Bruce, Lois and me. Nice wrapping job. It is a little note. Looks like some instructions maybe. I hope it doesn't say some assembly required. No. It's just a piece of paper with a few words on it. What in the world does it say? Would you read that for me? Let me try someone else just to make sure we really are reading what it says. Yes that is what it says. *How great is the love the Father has lavished on me, that I should be called a child of God! And that is what I am! I John 3:1*

The gift we want each of you to take from us is not something that belongs to us. But it is something that we have been given the authority, privilege and joy to share with you. It is a truth that has wrapped its firm, safe arms around each of us and we want to make sure that you live with that same security.

(Pastor Goff goes into the audience and says to different people) Bob - God loves you! Tammi - You are God's child! Jim- I see your heavenly Father in you. Susie- you did just what your dad in heaven would have done this week.

One of the games most parents play with their kids when they are real small is the "how much do you love me" game. And the response is to open the arms wide and say "This much!" Well, let me see if I can remind you how much God loves you this morning. Because, frankly, there are going to be some times in the coming 12 months when I am either going to wonder about God's love or because of decisions I make not believe God could really love me.

Let's turn to I John together. This very personal letter of John is believed by most to be written by John in his later years. Addressed to the churches in Asia Minor after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD but before his exile to Patmos. Advanced in years, John writes this fatherly letter out of loving concern for his children.

John tells us this. God has poured out his love on us. I love the versions that use the word lavish because it is not a word we use often and yet it is one that creates a pretty good word picture. It means **plentiful, abundant, sumptuous, copious, bountiful and prolific**. I did a word search on lavish and came up with such things as lavish cruises, lavish shoes for women, lavish diamonds, lavish yarns and lavish weddings and when I looked at each of the sites and saw what it cost to purchase lavish whatever, I just whistled. The prices associated I drew a very quick conclusion. They were all out of my

league. They were beyond even extravagant. Even if I won the lottery they would be out of reach. John, in this one short verse tells us that God's love is so lavish, so extravagant, so over the top that we can't even begin to imagine it. But bottom line is it has resulted in us being called sons and daughters of God. Think of it this way. What if all of a sudden the back doors of the sanctuary opened and in walked eight men with brief cases. In the middle of the men was a very familiar face. Mr. Bill Gates. And they walked up on to the platform and Bill took my microphone from me and said. "I have a very important announcement to make. This morning I had my legal team that is standing with me file papers in Hennepin county in the State of Minnesota to officially declare that Joel Goff is my full and legal son. And with that he can now use my name and family identity for the rest of his life. All of a sudden lavish would mean everyday for me. But that is still minor league when you realize that the God who created everything there is by speaking it into existence has declared that I am his child. That I can call him Dad. It takes my breath away. Now, let me transition here. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as the forgiver of your sins and the Lord of your life God's love is being lavished on you everyday because you are a son or daughter of God. It is a legal transaction that is a done deal. You are going to need this declaration for two very different situations. And that is why the 11 of us want to give it to you. We are concerned that the experiences of the next 12 months may cause you to question the extent of God's love for you. For some it will be the experiences of heartache, disappointment, loss and grief. Relationship will disintegrate, loved ones will die, hopes and dreams will be shattered, plans will be thrown into the air. In the next 12 months some of you will go through the **deepest waters you have ever gone** through. I know that you do not want to think of that at this time of year but experience tells me this is true. And whatever that is it will lead you to question the extent of God's love for you. You will struggle with a variety of emotions. Anger, disappointment, fear, distrust and the list goes on. I want this verse to come to you. I want this verse to be close because it may mean the difference between hope and despair. I want you to know that your experience does not negate your identity. Did you hear that? Whatever your experience is does not negate your identity. Turn back to Romans 8:35. Listen to these words *Does it mean that he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death?... Nothing can separate us from his love. Death can't and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries for tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away.*" I think that pretty well covers the territory. So when you receive a card this morning I want you to keep it close. In your wallet or your purse and when you hit the deep waters. Take it out. Read it again and again. And this is one case where even if you memorize it you will find it more helpful to take out the card and read it. . *How great is the love the Father has lavished on me, that I should be called a child of God! And that is what I am!*

Now the second situation. I want to say this as gentle as I can. I want to say this with all the pastor's heart I have. I do not say this so it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy but because it sadly is true. **Some of you are going to cross boundaries in your life that will cause great heartache and distress.** Some of you here this morning will for whatever reason break your marriage vows. Some of you will cross a line in business that will bring shame and embarrassment on your families. Some of you will make choices that will destroy your family, your parents or your kids. Someone here might this

morning may make a decision that will cost another person their life. And when you begin to come to grips with the havoc and destruction and heartaches and pain that your decision has caused to those around you the voice of the evil one will say in all manner of ways. God certainly can't love you anymore. Romans 7:24, 8:1 ***Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is so dominated by sin? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord...So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus***". Now, some of you here are going to be in the situation where you are close to the person that goes over the boundary and you might be tempted in your disgust to walk away. Let me beg of you to walk towards that person and bring this verse that reminds them of the lavish nature of God's love. And so that is the gift we wish to give to each and every one of you. As you leave this morning the ushers will give you a verse card to keep with you. Don't leave home without it.