



(From the sermon on October 25, 2015)

Ellen and I watched the movie, *Far From the Madding Crowd* – 2015 (from the Thomas Hardy novel, PG-13), a few nights ago about a woman who was a free spirit and naturally independent. Like the rest of us, she needed love and affection but didn't recognize the true source until a lot of pain and disappointment had bled through her life. Turning away the gestures of two men who wanted to care for her and protect her she became distracted by the seduction of a selfish, lust-driven man who had very little interest in her well-being. After a time of delusion this woman seemed to feel empty and lost, no longer understanding the meaning of love and the value of being loved. In the end (SPOILER ALERT!), however, the faithful presence of a man who had loved her through all her struggles finally became visible to her and she recognized her first and true love to be all she really needed.

Paul made the connection for us... "But Christ died for us while we were still sinners, and by this God showed how much he loves us" (Romans 5:8 ERV).

Love is truly a God-thing!

So much of life is a reflection of love given, love ignored, love lost, and a love which conquers. We find that we search and yearn for the one perfect experience that would equal the years of forging the image or standard for how that will look.

I know it is counter cultural, but our search for love and the standard that we have envisioned comes from our likeness to our Creator. He made us out of His own image. He, too, loves and seeks us out for us to have the knowledge of that love and to experience His great and perfect place in our lives. He made us creatures that desire to be relative in life and the best way for our relativity is through relationships.

But we struggle with the simplicity of the message that "God is all we need". Our difficulty in getting our head around how a relationship with the mysteriously powerful God, Whom we cannot see, can improve our ability to love and our consequent search for love opens the door for our own futile search – often taking us down paths we probably should have avoided.

All the while, God loves us! He patiently waits for our acknowledgement for the need of His place in our lives. Like the Israelites, we wander and grumble about life when He has promised a land of "milk and honey". We question Him like Job did in spite of His enduring promises through many trials of our quest. David

lamented, what seemed to be God's absence in his life, but God continued to fulfill yet more promises to him by conquering more enemies and gaining more land to David's kingdom.

While the Jews distorted the commands of God and looked in their own places to define His approach, He died for them.

We, too, are filling our lives with the illusions of fulfillment and then we wake up the next morning feeling empty, used and violated. We want to be loved but we're looking in all the wrong places.

The prophet Hosea spoke for the Lord (4:1-3), "There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land. You make vows and break them; you kill and steal and commit adultery. There is violence everywhere – one murder after another. That is why your land is in mourning, and everyone is wasting away."

Why?

The answer can be found in John's vision found in the book of Revelation when Jesus says, "... I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (Revelation 2:4-5).

We have forsaken our first love! So how do we see our First Love more clearly? Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

First of all, recognize our relationship with the Lord is the most important one we'll ever have. Once we can understand the love of God and how that is transferred to us for our well being and for all eternity, then we'll be better able to know love in the hearts of those around us.

Seek the First Love in life. Then love with the fullest capability you have.