

PING PONG LOVE

(Isaiah 55:1-9)

Intro: You can't play ping pong by yourself.
-Maybe you can.
 #I don't think it would be much fun.
 *Hitting the ball over the net.
 *Chasing it down.
 *Picking it up off the floor.
 *Hitting it from the other side.
 #Because there was no one on the other side of the net.
 *To hit it back.
-It takes two (or more) to play ping pong.

You can't love by yourself.
-Maybe you can.
 #For a little while.
 #But how long before your bucket is empty?
 *If you're:
 +Continually giving.
 +Not getting anything in return.
 +Getting rejection and negativity in return.
-It takes two (or more) to love.

Christian faith makes much of the number "three."

-Triune God.
 #Father.
 #Son.
 #Holy Spirit.
-Peter denies Jesus three times.
-Jesus forgives Peter three times.
 #Asking him three times.
 *After Jesus' resurrection:
 +"Do you love me?"
 =John 21:15-17.
-Jesus rises from the grave on the third day.

I would like to have us reflect on three questions.

-How can two people love each other for 50 years?
 #I'm thinking of Mary and Jerry Peterson.
 *Celebrating their golden wedding anniversary.
 *Renewing their wedding vows.

#Some have been married longer than that.

#Others not so long.

*How do two people keep the ping pong game of love going?

+For:

=50 years.

=25 years.

=5 years.

=5 months.

-How can we keep on loving God?

#God who is sometimes not pleased with us.

*1 Corinthians 10:5.

#God who calls us:

*To repent.

*To shape up or ship out.

*To cut it out or get cut down.

+Luke 13:6-9.

#How do we keep on loving a God like that?

*For:

+50 years.

+50 months.

+50 days.

+50 minutes.

-How can God keep on loving us?

#We who are often:

*Unloving.

*Unlovely.

*Unlovable.

#We who are such lousy ping pong players.

*How can God love us?

+Not just for 50 years.

+But for:

=One more year.

-Luke 13:8.

=Eternity.

-Isaiah 55:3.

Let's start with the last question first.

I. How Can God Keep On Loving Us?

A. Israel Had Just Completed A 50-Year Time Out.

1. 50 years.
 - a. In the dog house.
 - b. In exile.
 - In Babylon.
 - Punishment from God for Israel's:
 - #Disobedience.
 - #Unbelief.
2. How could God still love them?
 - a. After 50 years.
 - b. After all Israel had done.
 - Against God.
 - Against one another.
3. Answer.
 - a. Tells us more about God.
 - Than about Israel.
 - b. It is God's nature to love.
 - “God is love.”
 - #1 John 4:8.
 - *In Greek.
 - +ἀγαπή (agapḗ).
 - =Selfless.
 - =Self-giving love.
 - In Hebrew.
 - #*Chesed*.
 - *Abiding love.
 - *Steadfast love.
 - +Isaiah 55:3.
 - +Gospel Acclamation for Lent.
 - =“Return to the Lord your God,”
 - “For he is gracious and merciful,”
 - “Slow to anger,”
 - “And abounding in steadfast love (*chesed*).”
 - Joel 2:13.
 - +Similar words occur in the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - =Not three times.
 - =But 3x3 times = 9.
 - Exodus 34:6. -Psalm 103:8.
 - Numbers 14:18. -Psalm 145:8.
 - Nehemiah 9:17. -Joel 2:13.
 - Psalm 86:5. -Jonah 4:2.
 - Psalm 86:15.

- *Loving kindness.
 - + "He has told you, O mortal, what is good;"
 - "And what does the Lord require of you"
 - "But to do justice,"
 - "To love kindness (*chesed*),"
 - "And to walk humbly with your God?"
 - =Micah 6:8.
- *Amazing grace.
 - +Ben Asen.
 - =Lutheran.
 - =Professor of Old Testament.
 - At St. Louis University.
 - #Jesuit institution.
 - =Editor of *Catholic Digest*.
 - =Dear:
 - Friend.
 - Teacher.
 - +Translates *chesed* as:
 - =Amazing grace.

B. That is God's nature.

1. To display:
 - a. Steadfast love.
 - b. Loving kindness.
 - c. Amazing grace.
2. To Israel.
 - a. Going home:
 - After 50 years.
 - With nothing.
 - b. Offering them everything they need.
 - Like a vendor at a sporting event.
 - # "Beer here."
 - * "Ice cold beer."
 - # "Popcorn, peanuts."
 - * "Get your popcorn."
 - * "Get your peanuts."
 - Like a vendor at a home coming.
 - # "Water here."
 - * "Ice cold water here."
 - # "Bread, wine."
 - * "Get your bread."
 - * "Get your wine."

- c. All at the right price.
 - Without:
 - #Money.
 - #Price.
- 3. To us.
 - a. When we've been in the dog house.
 - For:
 - #50 seconds.
 - #50 years.
 - b. Offering us all that we need.
 - Waters.
 - #Of Holy Baptism.
 - Bread and wine.
 - #Of the Holy Supper.
 - c. All at the right price.
 - Without:
 - #Money.
 - #Price.
- 4. God loves us with:
 - a. Steadfast love.
 - b. Loving kindness.
 - c. Amazing grace.

II. How Can We Keep On Loving God?

- A. It Seems Easy Enough.
 - 1. All we have to do is:
 - a. Play ping pong.
 - b. Hit the ball back.
 - 2. All we have to do is return:
 - a. Steadfast love.
 - b. Loving kindness.
 - c. Amazing grace.
- B. But We Don't (Always).
 - 1. We don't always:
 - a. Want to play with God's ping pong ball.
 - b. Value God's gifts.
 - c. Value God's food.
 - 2. We value junk food.
 - a. "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?"
 - b. "And your labor for that which does not satisfy?"
 - Isaiah 55:2.

3. I once read a story.
 - a. Burglars:
 - Broke into a store.
 - Escaped undetected.
 - b. They didn't steal anything.
 - c. They just rearranged the price tags.
 - \$500 camera became \$5.
 - Box of stationary became \$200.
 - Color TV became \$9.95.
4. Isn't that what our sinful nature does?
 - a. Turns God's values upside down.
 - b. Replaces God's values with our values.
 - Trash becomes treasure.
 - Treasure becomes trash.
5. God says:
 - a. "Repent."
 - b. "Shape up or ship out."
 - c. "Cut it out or get cut down."
6. How do we keep loving a God who says that?
 - a. We keep loving a God:
 - Who shows:
 - #Steadfast love.
 - #Loving kindness.
 - #Amazing grace.
 - Who gives us another:
 - #Year.
 - #Two.
 - #Fifty.
 - Who would rather cut down his own Son.
 - #On a cross.
 - *Than cut us down.
 - b. We keep loving a God:
 - Who keeps loving us.
 - Who keeps:
 - #Hitting the ping pong ball to us.
 - #Inviting us to hit it back.
 - *To God.
 - *To one another.

III. Isn't That How Two People Can Keep On Loving One Another?

A. Not Our Efforts Alone.

1. We're lousy ping pong players.
 - a. Missing the ball.
 - b. Hitting it:
 - Into the net.
 - Off the table.
2. We like to keep score.
 - a. One is a winner.
 - b. One is a loser.
 - There goes the love.

B. God Keeps Hitting The Ping Pong Ball To Us.

1. Ping pong ball.
 - a. Steadfast love.
 - b. Loving kindness.
 - c. Amazing grace.
2. Ping pong ball.
 - a. Water and Word.
 - b. Bread and wine.
3. Ping pong ball.
 - a. *Chesed*.
 - Goes back and forth.
 - Multiplies.
 - b. Forgiveness.
 - c. Grace.
 - d. Love.

Concl: Ping pong, anyone?

