

Thomas Merton was a 20th century religious philosopher who wrote multiple classic books on aspects of the Christian life. In *No Man in an Island*, he has this to say about love.

“A happiness that is sought for ourselves alone can never be found: for a happiness that is diminished by being shared is not big enough to make us happy.”

Anything that makes us alone happy isn't true happiness. If we share that happiness and feel less somehow because of having shared it, that isn't true happiness.

Merton goes on to say, ***“True happiness is found in unselfish love, a love which increases in proportion as it is shared.”***

And there we see both Christ and His mission for the church. If Merton is right in what he's saying (and I think he is), then Christ's unselfish love in dying on the cross made Him happy. This is because that Christ-love increases the more it is shared. It can't be overshared; it can't be used up.

Hebrews 12:2 says that “Jesus...for the joy set before Him, endured the cross...”

Jesus' happiness wasn't in something selfish, something that was good for Him alone. It was something He shared, and that love increases and expands with each one who receives it.

He shares His love unreservedly with us, and we share that love with others in the family of God, and with those currently outside the family of God. When we share love with each other, it doesn't feel like we're losing love—we are filled with more love than we had before we shared it. The same thing happens when we share God's love with those who don't know Him yet. It doesn't take anything away from our store of love; if they receive it, there is an increase in love.

But Merton also notes a potential problem with giving love unselfishly: when the one being given love receives it selfishly.

“Unselfish love that is poured out upon a selfish object does not bring perfect happiness: not because love requires a return or a reward for loving, but because it rests in the happiness of the beloved. And if the one loved receives love selfishly, the lover is not satisfied. He sees that his love has failed to make the beloved happy. It has not awakened his capacity for unselfish love.”

This connects to all of us. Jesus has poured out His unselfish love on all of humanity, but some of us resist the change that His love is supposed to bring—to “awaken (our) capacity for unselfish love”. Jesus, says Merton, is not perfectly happy in giving this love if it doesn’t change us to be more like Him—one willing to love unselfishly.

There are three things to take away from Merton’s thoughts today.

1. First, the best love is unselfishly given to others
2. Second, unselfish love continues to grow
3. Third, unselfish love’s goal is to make the one being loved more unselfish

We remember again this morning that Jesus went willingly to the cross to die for us. We remember that His sacrifice paid the debt for our selfishly committed sins. We remember that He is happiest when we realize our selfishness and allow His love to change us to being more like Him.