

INI

1 John 4,16-21

Trinity 1 – 7 June 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you all. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle Lesson from John's First Letter, which was read earlier:

God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.¹⁹ We love, because He first loved us.

So far the text. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our strength and our Redeemer.

Introduction. It's June. Traditionally, this is the month when many weddings take place. June and weddings speak about love.

There is a story about a young man telling his fiance how much he loved her. Her said that every night he would read poetry to her. He would write poetry for her. He would serenade her with love ballads. They would have dinners by candlelight. He would climb mountains for her. This went on and on. Finally the fiancee said, "Yes, that's all very nice, but will you wash the dishes?"

Love can be a fuzzy emotion. Kind of like Barney, the purple dinosaur popular with children, who dances around and sings, "I love you, you love me." But for love to be genuine, it has to be put into action. "Will you wash the dishes?"

When we go to a restaurant, we see the nice tables and the waiters

and waitresses. The food is served and then after eating the plates are taken away. Everything is nice. But if we go into the kitchen it is hot and steamy. There at the back is the dish washer, the person who makes sure that all the dirt and grime is washed from the cutlery, the plates, the glasses, the cups, the serving platters. He's the low man on the totem pole. It's a minimum wage job. No glory and no contact with the public. But the dishes have to be washed.

If we read the apostle John's letters we see many references to love. Because of all of the references to love, John is sometimes called "the Apostle of Love." These references to love, however, are not to an abstract, fuzzy notion about love.

The love that John writes about comes from God Himself. God then shows His love in action by sending God the Son into the world. Jesus, God's Son and our Savior, is the One Who shows us love in action. He is the One Who did the dirty job that no one else wanted to do nor could do — die for our sins. He did not receive a minimum wage, but He paid the maximum price. Because of His death and resurrection, we are washed clean from our sins, washed clean to be able to stand without fear before God and to love like Jesus loved us.

This brings me to today's sermon theme: "**Love In Action.**" I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Love In The World;**
- 2) Love Casts Out Fear;** and
- 3) We Love Because Jesus First Loved Us.**

1) Love In The World. There is love in the world. Because God is love, in addition to being holy and just and righteous and merciful, that love is shown in creation.

In creation, God spoke and our world and universe came into

being. This was not the product of chance. It was ordered and all things worked together. God created man, Adam and Eve. They were created in His image. They were created with the capacity to love, to care for one another as God cared for them.

But sin came into the good and loving world God had created. Sin not only sets itself against God, but thinks it knows better than God. It measures good and evil in terms of itself, of egocentricity, rather than against what God calls good and evil. It does not seek forgiveness but excuses, it does not accept responsibility but seeks to shift or share the blame. Sin means that the relationship between God and mankind was ruptured. It means that the image in which God had created man had been shattered. The capacity to love still resides in humans, but that capacity no longer reflects God's perfect love but the love that has been warped by sin itself.

We live in a world in which there is love, but that love often falls short of not only what God expects, but what we as human beings expect as well.

Teenagers profess love one to another, but often this is just a cover for lust. A recent study from Great Britain looks at a survey that indicated that 40 percent of British women are unfaithful and so it suggests that there must be a gene that predisposes such women to infidelity. I would suggest that sin is a better explanation than any kind of genetic predisposition. Furthermore, I doubt if women are more unfaithful than men – after all, both are sinners.

Think about sacrificial love among humans. Even there the record is less than stellar and those whom we call saints often have feet of clay. Albert Schweitzer was a medical missionary to the Congo. But his private journals reveal that he thought that blacks were slightly less than human and conducted experiments on them that we would term unethical. Mother Teresa cared for the dying untouchables in Calcutta.

But to raise money she associated with dictators and other undesirables. Again, sin rears its ugly head.

Of marriage, where love should express itself in an unselfish manner, we see the effects of sin as well. People who professed love to one another “until death do us part,” find that they can fall out of love as easily as fall into love. We do not have to look at movie stars, some of whose marriages can be measured in weeks instead of years, but we look around us and the divorce statistics speak for themselves. The effects of sin undermine our society.

Even within our own lives, the love we show often falls short of what we expect. Is our love always patient? Is our love always kind? Is our love sometimes jealous? Does our love sometimes keep tally of the wrongs we suffer? Does our love sometimes laugh at the misfortune of others? Does our love sometimes seek what is best for ourselves rather than what is best for another? If in any degree we answer “Yes,” then we see sin at work in our lives.

Love exists in our world, but it is a far cry from what God intended. Love exists, but it is often distorted by selfishness, itself the product of sin. It is not the love of which John speaks. It is not the love God intended us to have.

If we want to know about love we have to look to God Himself and why He sent His Son into world. In Jesus we see that

2) Love Casts Out Fear. John says that “perfect love casts out fear.” Here we have to ask ourselves, “why” and “from what should we have fear”? The answers to these two questions go hand in hand.

The fear of which John speaks is the fear of punishment on the Day of Judgment. This is the fear that afflicts all people, even though many try to deny that there is a Last Judgment and that a God of love would

punish them for being a bit less than perfect.

People misread the Scriptures when they say that because God is love He will never punish anyone on the Last Day, the Day of Judgment. To believe in this is to believe that God's love is a warm, fuzzy feeling that accepts everything, kind of like Barney dancing around and singing "I love you, you love me." It also defines love from the standpoint of the person rather than from the standpoint of God. This is a big mistake.

God's love is indeed love, but the love of God perfectly reveals itself in His Son, Jesus Christ. In Christ we see God's love in action. This love is the love of will and determination rather than emotion. This is the love for the loveless that drives Jesus to the Cross of Golgotha.

On June 6, 2004, President George Bush spoke in Normandy in France in commemoration of the D-Day landings of 1944. In his speech he quoted Jesus' words in the Gospel of John: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15,13). President Bush was speaking about the American war dead. But in listening to the interviews with survivors of D-Day, he could also have been speaking about the Germans, the British, the Canadians, or other troops who took part in that day. The survivors always spoke of fighting for their buddies — the men they had trained with and at whose side they fought.

But Jesus did not just lay down his life for his friends. He laid down His life for His enemies as well. God's love has a purpose. To win forgiveness for sinners. To pay the price sin demands. To make payment to God for sin.

That's why Jesus went to the Cross. And He rose from the dead to show the world that He is the Lord of life in whose name forgiveness is to be preached to all nations. That death and that resurrection was God's way of providing for all people — including you and me — a means of escape from the wrath of the Judgment to come.

Apart from Jesus all people stand condemned before God's justice. But God was unwilling that any should perish, so He sent His Son to die and win forgiveness for us while we were yet sinners.

The love of God which is shown to us in Christ then permits us without fear to face the day when Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead. On that great and terrible day we will not stand alone, but will stand before the judgment seat of God with Christ at our side.

Jesus is the One who makes intercession for us now and then. He is the One who has washed us in His blood in our Baptism and continues to wash us from all sins as we make confession to Him. He is the One who has given us to eat and drink of His true Body and Blood to strengthen us in our fight against sin, death, and the power of the devil. He is the One who has shown us that these are defeated enemies. He is the One who shows us that

3) We Love Because He First Loved Us. God first so loved His fallen creation that He gave Adam and Eve a promise that He would send a Savior. In Jesus we see that promise take on flesh and live for us.

Jesus lived and He died showing us God's love. Indeed, He lived and died and showed us what love really means.

God's Love comes from a forgiving nature. When Jesus forgave sin, He did not do so, so that people might continue in sin. He forgave so that people might be made alive to God, and alive for God, and alive for each other. He forgave so that God's Spirit might live in those forgiven and make them alive to forgiveness and to love.

This is the love that does not hate. This is the love which shares God's love in Christ, to share even with one's enemies.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you;⁴⁵ in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?⁴⁸ Therefore you are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5,43-48)

It is only by being forgiven that we can even attempt to love our enemies. If this is done half-heatedly, just going through the motions, or not done at all, it is sin. Why? Listen to Jesus’ words: “Therefore you are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.” I am not perfect and I suspect no one else here is either. If we do not love perfectly before God, we sin.

Jesus offers us His forgiveness not as a way out, but rather as a strength, so that we need not fear to try to love the way He loved, a love which went to the Cross. If we fear, shall we ever even try? But Jesus has conquered death and gives us life, life even in the face of our enemies so that we need not fear loving them.

If we are sinned against, we do not need to stew and fret and try to take vengeance into our own hands. We leave vengeance up to God, and in the meantime we are freed to love them and share with them the Gospel of Christ. We may find rejection, but Jesus found rejection as well. What was Jesus’ response? He kept on loving and kept going towards the Cross.

Conclusion. It is only in Jesus that we see God’s perfect love in action.

This is the love that washes the dishes. This is a love which seeks out the lost in order that they might realize that they need not stand condemned before God and fearful on Judgment Day, but forgiven.

God's love in Jesus had a purpose: to win for us forgiveness of sins.

God's love alive in our hearts has a purpose as well: to reflect the love we have first been shown in Christ. We have been forgiven so that we need not fear failure and be paralyzed from even trying. We have been forgiven to show people what love really is by pointing all to Christ. We have been forgiven to bring the message of reconciliation to a world which is dying to know what true love is: the Love which went to the Cross to pay for our sins. We have been forgiven so that we may reach out even to our enemies even as Christ reached out to us. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

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