

INI

1 John 3,11-18

Trinity 2 — 14 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. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson, which was read earlier:

We know love by this, that He [Jesus] laid down His life for us Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

So far the reading. 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. Amen.

Introduction: I think we've all heard the saying, "You have to learn to hate." For example, I am reminded of a song from the musical, "South Pacific," which was "You've Got To Be Carefully Taught." You might ask, "What is it that one has to be carefully taught?" The answer, according to some of the lyrics:

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You've got to be carefully taught.

But if one has to be taught to hate, is the opposite true? That is, does love come naturally to every boy and girl ever born. Is love the default condition of humans at birth?

If you've ever watched little children playing with one another, you sometimes see one snatch a toy from the other and say, "It's mine!" That's not exactly love in action. As a matter of fact, I don't think selfishness is something that is learned. On the contrary, parents have to teach their children to share. And to go one step further, they have to teach them to love as well.

Why do suppose that is?

The Bible tells us. All of us are born sinful. Sinfulness works its way into our very being. It manifests itself in small things, such as yelling, “It’s mine,” and by the way, adults can act the same way, but they’ve learned to be a bit more subtle about it. And it manifests itself in big ways as well: strife, hate, envy, war, coveting, and the list goes on.

Because we are born sinful, the nature of man hasn’t changed much since our first parents, Adam and Eve, fell into sin and gave mankind the gift that keeps giving: sin, and its wage, death – a deadly duo.

The early Christians had to confront sin as well. So the Apostle John wrote to the followers of Jesus about what love really is and on whom it is built. His words speak to us as well. This brings me to today’s sermon topic: “**Loving In Deed And In Truth.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Cain And The World Hate;**
- 2) Jesus Overcomes Hatred With Sacrificial Love;** and,
- 3) In Christ We Love In Deed And In Truth**

1) Cain And The World Hate. Do we remember the story of Adam and Eve’s first children, Cain and Abel?

Cain was the first born son and Abel the second born. Abel was a tiller of the ground and Cain was a herdsman. They both built altars and offered the best of their respective crops and animals to the Lord. The account in Genesis says that the Lord had regard for Abel’s offering but not Cain’s offering. Cain became angry. God warned Cain not to let sin get the better of him. Cain didn’t listen and killed his brother Abel. (See Genesis 4) You could say that here we have an example of the first dysfunctional family, sibling rivalry taken to an extreme.

In looking at this and preaching on this, Luther had a pretty good grasp of the situation and a pretty good grasp of human nature as well. Eve thought her first born was going to be the Savior, the One who would crush the head of the Evil Foe even though the Foe would bite the Savior’s heel. All their hopes were put on Cain. He grew up thinking he was the favored one, the golden boy, the darling of their and God’s eye.

But when Cain's offering was refused, Cain's egocentric bubble burst. He burned with hatred against God and against his brother. Cain could not forgive his brother for receiving God's favor. Thus, in the field, away from the eyes of his parents and seemingly away from God's eyes as well, Cain killed his brother.

Cain then becomes the spirit of the world — hating God and hating those who follow God, that is, the Church.

Luther asks: What wrong had Abel ever done to his brother? What wrong did the holy patriarchs, the prophets, and most of all, Christ Himself, ever do to anyone else? The answer, of course is, nothing. But what is the reaction of the world? Hate! (see: Luther on 1 John 3,12-18 in *Sermons of Martin Luther*, 8:41-46)

Thus it goes through the ages.

People may be subtle in expressing their disdain or hatred. They may be overt in expressing their hatred, but express it they will.

One example from a Lutheran context will suffice. The head of the religion department at Saint Olaf College is a Hindu — don't ask me how this could happen. He is on record as saying that to claim the Jesus is the only way to God is an example of hate speech that should not be tolerated.

What does this mean? Not only does the world deny Christ, it demands that Christians affirm and accept its rejection, and usually this affirmation and acceptance in the name of tolerance.

Thus, the Apostle John is right to remind his readers and us, do not marvel, don't be surprised, that the world hates you.

The world abides in sin, and in relation to God, sin is the kingdom of darkness and death — it is the spirit of Cain, the spirit of hatred.

Who, then, wants to be reminded of sin? Who wants to be reminded that apart from Christ they dwell in spiritual darkness — Deepak Chopra and his weird ideas of a "third Christ" notwithstanding? Who wants to be reminded that the wages of sin are death — that is, spiritual death, physical death, and finally eternal death?

Beloved, don't be surprised that the world hates you. But always remember, that:

2) Jesus Overcomes Hatred With Sacrificial Love. Jesus was under no illusions as to the successors of Cain and the spirit of the world. During His earthly ministry, He forewarned His disciples:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15,18-19)

Do Jesus words remind us of Cain and Abel? God chose Abel's offering. He told Cain not to let sin rule him, not to let jealousy and envy get the better of him. So Jesus tells His disciples, as He tells us, "I chose you." And what is the world's reaction, first to Jesus and then to those whom He has chosen to follow Him? Hatred!

But Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world; rather, He came to save the world from itself, from the powers which rule it, sin, death, and the devil, and from the spiritual darkness which covers it on account of sin.

Jesus did not come to overcome hatred with hatred, nor violence with a show of force.

Jesus came to crush the head of the old Evil Foe who had led Adam and Eve into sin in the first place.

Jesus came to have the Foe bite Him on the heel, so to speak.

And that biting on the heel occurred when Jesus went to go to the Cross where the powers of sin, death, and darkness would attempt to do their worst, to kill the very Son of God.

On the evening of that first Good Friday it looked as if they had won. Jesus had died on that Cross and His body was laid in the grave.

But as the sinless Son of God, Jesus had not died for Himself. He had died for those who had crucified Him. He died for those whom He had called but had run away. He died for the sins of the world. He died for you and me.

On the third day, however, the darkness which had tried to overcome Jesus was shattered. On the third day, the chains of death that had tried to keep Jesus in the grave were shattered. On the third day, the power of Satan who manipulates the world of sin was shattered. On the third day Jesus rose from the grave.

Jesus' death, then, was the death of the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus' death was the power of sacrificial love shown to the loveless.

His resurrection was the power of the Light of the World shining through the darkness which had tried to overcome it.

His resurrection was the power of love which overcomes hatred.

His resurrection was the power of life that overcomes death.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the only way to God the Father. In His resurrection we have the assurance of life even in the face of death.

Thus, the Apostle John is bold to say:

3) In Christ We Love In Deed And In Truth. John contrasts loving in with word or tongue with loving with deed and truth.

We all know what John means by loving with word and tongue. We might use the phrase: "hot air." We might say, "Talk is cheap."

And when John says to love "with deed and truth," that might be better translated as to love "in deed and in truth."

This is more than saying, "Actions speak louder than words, although it certainly says that, because deeds make words come alive.

John adds “in truth,” because he and his readers know full well that Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” To say, “in truth,” says nothing less than “in Christ.”

Deeds done “in Christ” are deeds that are based first of all on what Christ has done for us. He is the Good Shepherd Who laid down His life for the sheep, for John, for the early readers of his letter, for us.

If we read the rest of John’s letter, we know that “deeds done in truth” are those deeds which spring from a correct confession of Jesus as the Son of God Who came in the flesh to win for us the forgiveness of sins.

Thus, deeds done “in truth” are those deeds which are done in Christ and in a correct confession of Who Jesus is and what He has done.

James says the same thing:

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But if someone will say, “You have faith and I have works, show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2,15-17)

It is as Luther said, we are saved by faith alone — faith, God’s gift to us, which holds on Christ, given in Holy Baptism, sustained by the Word, nourished by Holy Communion — but faith is never alone.

This is the faith that sees the Good Shepherd laying down His life for the sheep, and in winning for us the forgiveness of sins opens to us the riches of heaven itself, life and salvation.

This is the Good Shepherd Who lays down His life for the sheep, so that the poor have the Gospel preached to them.

This is the Good Shepherd who opened His heart even unto death itself and calls those whom He has chosen through His Word unto Himself. Where His Word

is proclaimed, there it is that He calls.

John says that when we see others within our fellowship, brothers and sisters, who are in want of daily bread — that is, this world's goods — and close up our hearts — literally, close up our inmost being — then we have hardened ourselves from God's love.

This is the warning that God gave to His Old Testament people, those who were waiting for the promise of the Savior, Jesus. In Deuteronomy we read:

If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in the land which the Lord your God is giving to you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother. (Deuteronomy 15,7-8)

Only the forgiveness of Christ, won by Him on the Cross, can break the hardness of heart that by nature would afflict us all.

Do not think that this hardening is a recent phenomena or that early Christians were so filled with the love of Christ that it could not happen to them. Think of the account in the sixth chapter of the Book of Acts, where we read of a split in the Jerusalem church where the Aramaic-speaking Jews of Judea didn't want to share equally with Greek-speaking Jewish widows. Not quite love in action. But we all wrestle with sin.

But in Christ, through His body and blood on the Cross, God has closed the gap between rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, man and woman, and has freely poured out His love in forgiveness, love which overflows.

Conclusion: The natural inclination of mankind is to scream, "It's mine!"

What does "It's mine!" say? It says there is never enough to go around. It says "You're not worthy!" It says, and it says it way down deep, "I hate you."

The Old Adam clings to us all, which is the spirit of the world, the spirit of Cain. Even though all people are born in sin and enemies of God, God the Son, Jesus, entered this world of ours to bring

light which dispels spiritual darkness,
life in the forgiveness of sin which conquers death,
and love through the Cross which dispels hatred.

In small ways and big ways, all of us have that spirit of “It’s mine” lurking within us and seeking to overwhelm us.

But in the biggest way imaginable, Christ on the Cross won forgiveness for us to break the power of sin, to break the magic spell of “It’s mine.”

Only in Christ, in Truth itself, are we empowered to share what He has first shared with us — not only our daily bread but the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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