

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 19, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 351, 141:4-5, 245, 361, 644.

Lessons: Psalm 31, Romans 5:1-11, John 15:1-15.

Sermon Text: 1 John 4:7-10

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Have you noticed how many times the word “love” appears in John’s first letter? Count them the next time you read through the entire book, which is only about 4 pages in a printed Bible.

Are you getting sick and tired of sermons about love?

Does God ever get sick and tired of telling us that he loves us? In his Gospel, John tells us ever so plainly of God’s love for mankind. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

Everyone needs to feel loved. And everyone really wants to be able to give love. But the kind of love that John talks about is not just impulses, infatuation, not just losing oneself to emotion. This is not just being nice, or winning friends and influencing people.

In order to know what real, true love is all about we must look at God’s love for mankind. For that reason we ask today

HOW MUCH DOES GOD LOVE US?

- 1. God gave up his only Son because he loved us.**
- 2. God did this so that we might live through his Son Jesus and reflect that love.**

In this letter John has written of those who had left the visible Christian church as false prophets. In fact, he has called them antichrists, meaning those who are totally opposed to Christ. Christ himself said *“He who is not with me is against me.”* (Matthew 12:30) Such defections surely had an effect on those Christians, much as anyone leaving our fellowship after having been with us for a long time. One of the reasons John speaks so much of love may be that he is attempting to mend the wounds in the church caused by the departure of those who left the church and to encourage the remaining faithful Christians to redouble their efforts to create true Christian community. They must rally and pull together.

For that reason we find in our text today the source of love emphasized again, together with encouragement to love one another with God’s kind of love.

One writer called this chapter the strongest single chapter in the Bible concerning the love of God. The basic message is simple: God is love.

So what is this love that God speaks of? Not lust. Not self-serving. Not wondering ‘what’s in it for me?’ or ‘what will I get back if I love?’ Not just giving things.

It is God’s nature to be kind, and to give happiness, especially eternal happiness. All that God has revealed to us is really all about love; and all mankind would have been perfectly happy if they had obeyed what God told them. Yet despite the sinfulness of mankind, God provided the gospel, for the forgiveness of sin, and for the salvation of sinners and in that way shows that God is love.

We know that there are many different kinds of what is called “love” displayed among humans. There is lust. There is self-seeking love. There is a love that asks ‘what’s in it for me’, that is, ‘what will I get in return?’ There is conditional love, that is, ‘I will love you if you do this for me’.

And among those who believe in Jesus Christ as their only Savior from sin there is the highest kind of love, the unselfish love of God for sinful mankind. That is the kind of love John is talking about. That is the kind of love from God which John encourages us to give to others.

The Greek word used here for love is agape, (uh gah' pay) the highest form of love. This is a not selfish or self-seeking love. This is not merely a friendship between two people – people who see endearing qualities in each other and on that basis like each other and form an affection for each other.

John says plainly ***“Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”***

John shows that true, genuine love is grounded in God's nature. Those who have been ***“born of God”*** want to become more and more like Christ, because God lives in our hearts. God provides both the source and the example of the believer's love. In addition, love for others is an important part of one's relationship with God. While ***“no one has seen God”*** (John 1:18), God's love is evident in the work of Christ and in the believer's love for others.

John repeats words that are not new. ***“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.”*** We cannot generate or create love by ourselves. We reflect God's love in the world. God is the source of love; God personifies love. All love has its origin in the heart of God. He sent his Son to take on our human flesh, humble himself and present himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins so that we might live through him.

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

Love is the root of right relationships. Love is not something we manufacture. Love is the central characteristic of God himself and thus is a gift we receive from him. Love is defined not by words but by the act of God in giving his Son to die on the cross for us. That love motivates us to love others. When we do, we show that we belong to God and he lives in us even now, in this sinful world.

But God has found a way to let us come to live in his world, for free, through Jesus.

He tells us how and why it is that we can love: ***“Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”***

God's love creates a response of love in us. ***“We love because he first loved us.”*** (1 John 4:19)

We can know that we truly belong to God by checking to see if love controls our lives. Such love drives out any fear we might have of God's judgment.

This is the love which comes from God toward man. It all comes from God. Nothing in man the sinner, the God-hater, drew God to him. Love resided only in the heart of God. ***“God is love.”*** This love is love in its fullest sense and purpose. It sees our deadness and is able to bring us to life. This divine, infinite love will always remain the most wondrous and glorious mystery. It is too deep to be really understood by our finite minds. The fact that ***“God is love”*** is revealed to us through the Gospel.

Scripture speaks of all who believe in Jesus as adopted children of God. But Scripture also speaks here of believers as ***“born of God”***. The believer has been born of God. Being a child of God, he has inherited life from his Father. But just as our children inherit certain characteristics from us, so God's children inherit certain family characteristics from him. The believer will be like his father because the Father's love abides in him. He doesn't just imitate his father; he is like his Father because of heredity.

There must be love in the household of God!

It is easy to look at and see sin in others. It is harder to see sin in ourselves. It is easy to see lack of love in others. It is harder to see lack of love in ourselves. It is easy to look at someone else and conclude that they are not worthy of our love, or not deserving that we should love them.

But does God look at us and say he can't love us because we are not worthy of his love? Does God tell us that we are not deserving of his love because we are doing things wrong and not doing everything we should do? Absolutely not! Paul writes in Romans: ***“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** (Romans 5:8) Well, God does tell us that we are doing things wrong, and tells us what he wants us to do. That's what God's law tells and shows us. But he never stops loving us.

Look at the example of how God showed his love to us: ***“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”***

The more we become aware of the love and mercy God has shown us, the more motivation we have to show love and mercy to other people. One writer gave this example: The waters of the Dead Sea are unfit to drink and useless for irrigation because water only flows in; nothing flows out. The water can only evaporate and leave its toxic salts behind. In the same way, mercy, God’s love, needs to keep moving or we will stagnate. If we love one another, God’s love is made complete, that is, we fulfill his loving purpose and continue the chain reaction. Love stimulates more love, and in this way hatred is melted, wounds are healed, grudges are forgotten, grievances forgiven, hope shared, emptiness filled, and loneliness eased in human hearts.

All believers have been born again. The Holy Spirit lives in them and is generating loving thoughts, words, and deeds toward other people. Every time we show kindness to another person, we are proving to God, to people around us, and even to ourselves that we have indeed been born again, that the Holy Spirit is very much alive in us, that we know God, and he knows us.

No human has seen God face to face, but people can certainly see his love in action as it flows out of us.

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” What grand motivation! Why would we love one another? Because God loves us. Just as the moon has no light in itself, but reflects the light of the sun, so the Christian has no light or love within himself, but only reflects God’s love. For example, Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians: ***“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*** (Ephesians 4:32) He is even more emphatic a few verses later when we read: ***“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*** (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Listen to Jesus talking about giving to those who cannot give back to you. ***“Then Jesus said to his host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.’”*** There you have another example of how Christians can and should show love, love from God to others.

In God’s love we have the ultimate sacrifice. ***“He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*** Jesus Christ is that atoning sacrifice, also called the propitiation, for our sins. Peter tells us that ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”*** (1 Peter 2:24)

God was pleased, God was satisfied that the sins of all mankind were paid for, atoned for, in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. May that be our daily motivation for all the love we show in our lives. Amen.