

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sunday after Ascension, May 16, 2010

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Hymns: 223, 399:1-2, 397, 221, 218:6.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 7:1-8:2, 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13, John 3: 16-21.

Sermon Text: 1 John 4: 7-12.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Apostle John is the one who wrote in his Gospel about that love God has 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. In his Gospel he writes, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a great deal about God's love for us. And in his first epistle, from which our sermon text is taken, he writes a great deal more about love. He encourages and admonishes us today:

"LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

1. *"Love comes from God."*
2. *"Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."*

"God is Love". Those words, possibly the first Bible passage you ever learned, are found in our sermon text and repeated just four verses later. In the hymn we just sang, did you notice the emphasis on God loving us? In fact, God is personified as "love" and Jesus is called "Love".

Let me give you another example of love, of God's love for sinful mankind. We read in Romans 5:6-11: *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* That shows you just how much God loved us – sinful mankind. There is a lot more in that chapter: *"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."*

See how Saint Paul, writing by inspiration, makes it clear that it requires a tremendous amount of love to give up your life for someone. It is easy to do something or to give up something for someone who loves you and will appreciate what you are doing for them. It is the ingrates, the bad guys, the people who don't like us that it is hard to do anything for. But God did just that. In our Gospel lesson you heard that *"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. God GAVE. God sacrificed, in the same way that God's Old Testament people were required to sacrifice, that is, to kill lambs or bulls or goats or doves and give to God. God sacrificed not bulls or goats, but his very Son, true God and True Man, "the lamb of God".

If we are going to really define and understand this kind of love that God had and still has for mankind, we have to go far beyond any dictionary definition. If we start with the dictionary, we go down to the fourth definition of the noun "love", which tells us love is **"4 a:** unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another: as **(1):** the fatherly concern of God for humankind **(2):** brotherly concern for others". Our Old

Testament lesson today talks about God's love for the people he has chosen, the descendants of Abraham. God's love is a prelude, a prerequisite to their loving him. Before God gives the commands "*thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*" Deuteronomy 6:5, King James Version (KJV), he reminds them of all the ways he has shown them HIS love.

Our epistle lesson today talks about love. If you read it slowly, you could ponder some of the words and ideas God gives us in that chapter. Those words give us some idea of what love really is, in ways that we can recognize it among humans, and we can then strive to exercise love.

But we know that love does not come from ourselves. John is very clear about this: "***Love comes from God.***" There isn't enough time in one sermon to tell of all the ways that God loves you. But if you take a few minutes this week to read the letter of First John, you will be reminded again of God's love for you. Then read the whole Gospel of St. John looking for evidence of God's love for you. You will find an abundance of evidence of how God loves you. Then, too, look at your life, each day of it, to find evidences of God's love for you, both in physical, earthly gifts, and in spiritual gifts.

God loves us, despite our sins. He didn't send a Savior to redeem us from everlasting damnation because we are good people, or because he saw something good in us or even saw something potentially good in us. He did it all out of genuine love. "***But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***" Romans 5:8.

God is the source of all our love. That is why St. John can write for us: "***Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.***"

We have an encouragement and an admonition to "***love one another***". But we don't have to do it on our own, we can't get it on our own. It can't come from us. God is very clear about that, and from our experiences with mankind, we know this is true. Listen to St. Paul in Galatians 5:17-21: "***For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.***"

A few verses after our text we read: "***We love because he first loved us.***" 1 John 4:19. Perhaps you are more familiar with the KJV: "***We love him because he first loved us.***" But the New International Version is much more all-encompassing than the KJV. We love, not just God, but everyone, because he first loved us. And that love does not come from within us. Let me use an example. Where does the moon get its light? It is simply reflected light. When the moon is darkened because of an eclipse, it is dark. It simply reflects the light of the sun. So, too, the Christian doesn't have to find love in himself. He simply reflects the love God has given him or her. God first loved us. Listen to the way one writer talked about this: "What a relief it is to know that when God commands us to love other (sinful, undeserving) people, we don't have to come up with that love completely on our own. We merely have to pick up, use, and develop what's already there. God isn't saying, 'Come on – get love!' He is simply expecting us to use what we have. The Spirit who converted us has left a deposit [like a deposit in a bank] of his love in our hearts, and the more we give it away, the more we receive anew from the Spirit. What a relief it is to know that we don't have to save ourselves, regenerate our own dead hearts, transform our own hostile minds, climb up to God or earn his approval. God has made all the first moves! God has given us all the abilities he expects us to use! God is not commanding the impossible. It is natural, even automatic, that as people grow in their awareness of God's love for them, they grow in their desire to show love to other people. We know and rely on the love God has for us."

Because God loves us and we know that God loves us, now we have opportunity in our lives and with our lives to show our love for him. We show that love both to him and to others. True love is not selfish. It is not thinking and living and doing with an attitude of “what’s in it for me, what can I get out of it?”, but “what can I do for someone else?” The picture is clear: Give it away and you get more. When we are in Christ and Christ lives in us, we will be concerned for others, not for ourselves. Some people, it is true, try to be good to other people to earn something for themselves, to perhaps become better people in the eyes of the world, or mistakenly think they can earn God’s favor by doing good deeds. But God plainly tells us that his love for us came first. God plainly tells us that we cannot earn eternal life by doing good. We are saved by God’s grace, his “undeserved goodness and mercy”, his “undeserved LOVE”. ***“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 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. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”***

We warn one another and especially we warn our young people not to mistake lust for love. Love cares about the other person but lust cares for oneself, regardless of the lying words used by one person to take advantage of another.

Infants and toddlers can learn about love by the way we hold them and hug them. And don’t kisses usually go along with hugs? How do we show our love? Hugs and kisses. Let me use a personal example that I think you can all identify with. My grandsons are just 2 years old. The boys associate love with hugs. They don’t quite know what love is all about, but they know that it is good when mommy or daddy or grandma or grandpa gives them hugs. They have been getting hugs all their lives from people who love them.

Reflecting God’s love in our lives takes many forms, such as dedicating our lives to someone, or giving up anything and everything for someone. God is love. That’s a short sentence but a big thought. It is kind of like ***“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”*** 1 John 1:5. God is light. The idea is that our God provides illumination to help us think straight and provides love power to help us act right. What a comforting thought – when John says that you should love one another, you don’t have to come up with that love on your own. It’s already there! God has already placed it in your heart -- and it’s your role to use what you already have. Let it out!

God is love. More comfort! When we don’t like what we think God is doing, or when we fret about what we think God is not doing, it helps to take a deep breath and realize that his dominant emotion toward us because of Jesus is love. He tells us in Romans 8:28: ***“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*** Everything he does, and everything he chooses not to do is driven by his passionate love for his people. He loves his children far more than any of us fathers or mothers love our kids. He loves us far more than we love anyone else. There are many incentives for Christians to show love to one another. John lists these examples: Living in love is like basking in God’s very presence. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. And, letting love be your dominant mindset in life drives out fear. Who wants to live in constant fear? Nobody. Living in love expresses the love God first gave you and helps you grow in the confidence that God must really think you are valuable. You don’t have to interpret the hardships of your life as signs that God is punishing you. You don’t have to spoil your good times by dreading when the hammer might come down. You don’t have to stifle happiness, thinking, “I’ll pay for this later.”

The Christian wants to reflect God’s love in all he and she thinks, says, and does. ***“LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER”*** ***“Love comes from God.”*** ***“Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”*** May God grant that we all believe and show his love in our lives. Amen.