

Perfect Love Casts Out Fear – 1 John 4:7-21(v.18)

Read text – 1 John 4:7-21

Our passage today is quite long, and I am grateful to Donna for reading it for us. The theme of this passage is obvious: love.

It contains a call to love, points to the source of love, and tells of the results of love.

Let's unwrap this passage together...

First we start with the call to love.

Verse 7 starts with a command to love one another. The Apostle John says that before we do church, or discuss theology, or figure out dogmatics, we must be a people who know how to love. In fact, he is so bold as to say that if we love it is evidence that we have been born of God – or born again. If we do not love, it is evidence that we do not know God at all.

How can John say that? I go to church. I read my Bible and pray. I even tell others about Jesus. I put money in the offering plate now and again. I am basically a good person and have been a member of the church for a long time. How can John say I do not know God?

John is convinced that if we really know the Gospel message, we could not help but be people who love.

In verses 9-10 John gives a quick summary of the Gospel:

- God acted first, showing us his love

- God's love was shown to us by God sending his Son into the world to bring us life.

- If we want to understand love, it starts with what God did for us, not our response to him.

God sent his Son, Jesus, to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. This means that sin was keeping us from God, but what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary opened the door to the presence of God. What sin had taken from us God restored through the death of Jesus.

Love is sacrificial giving. It is caring more about others than even ourselves. Love is doing whatever is necessary to bridge the gap that separates people. Love holds nothing back. Jesus is the ultimate expression of love: "The Word (Jesus) became flesh and made his dwelling here among us."

Charles Stanley tells the story of a farmer who had some puppies for sale. As he was nailing a sign on his fence advertising the puppies, he felt a tug on his pant leg. Looking down he saw a young boy with a big grin on his face and something in his hand.

"Mister" he said, "I want to buy one of your puppies."

"Well" said the farmer, "these puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal."

The boy dropped his head for a moment, then looked back up at the farmer and said, "I've got thirty nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?"

"Sure," said the farmer, and with that he whistled and called out "Dolly, here, Dolly." Out from the doghouse and down the ramp ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur. The little boy's eyes danced with delight.

Then out from the doghouse peeked another little ball; this one noticeably smaller. Down the ramp it slid and began hobbling, trying to catch up with the others. The pup was clearly the runt of the litter.

The little boy pressed his face to the fence and cried out, "I want that one," pointing to the runt.

The farmer knelt down and said "Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you the way you would like."

With that the boy reached down and slowly pulled up one leg of his pants. In doing so he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his legs attaching itself to a specially made shoe. Looking up at the farmer, he said, "You see, sir, I don't run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands."

I like that story. It reminds us how great God's love is. We are just like that puppy that cannot run too well. We also hobble along in life, with our weaknesses. Perhaps, we feel like no one will really like us. Everyone else seems so "put together," capable, and talented. We always seem to stumble, make mistakes and say the wrong thing.

But what a joy to know God understands and still loves us. God is like that little boy who points to you and me, the ones who are left behind, and says "I want that one." God the Father sent His son, Jesus into the world, to become weak, to know our human side, and then to die for our sins because He chose to rescue us. That is love.

If God has called us to live a life of love, then He will also help us to fulfill that command. God never asks us to do something that we cannot do, though usually it is only possible with his help. And that is true with love. We cannot truly love on our own. Without God within us, we will fail at loving those around us. With God within us, we can truly love others.

So the second thing John wants us to see is the source of love.

In verse 12 John says that God's love is made complete in us as he lives within us. The world will know there is a God because they can see the evidence of his presence in his followers. And the one thing that will set them apart from all other peoples is that they will know how to love.

In verse 13 we move to the source of love in our lives, the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that allows us to know who Jesus is, and that He is the gift of God the Father. Verse 15 speaks of our confession of faith. It really is quite simple: we declare that Jesus is the Son of

God. This is not to make Jesus less than God – for they are one – but to declare that Jesus came from God for a purpose: to be the Saviour of the World (v. 14).

I must pause here and make sure you are getting this – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All three are God, and all three are active in our salvation. All three are intimately involved in showing us what love really is, and helping us to be people who know how to love as we are loved. It is true scriptures never use the word “Trinity” but in passages like this it is very clear that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all working to rescue us from sin and bring us into a living, loving relationship with God.

If my car needs gasoline, where will I take it to meet that need? A gas station

If I have a toothache and want relief, where do I go? To a dentist.

If I need food to eat, where would I go? To the grocery store.

If I need to learn to love, where should I go? To God.

Verse 16 tells us that God is love. All that God does flows from his love. So if we need to learn how to love, if we need to be filled with love so that it will motivate all we do, where should we turn? To the God who is love. He is the God who demonstrated what love is like by sending His Son to save us.

“Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” (v. 16)

We truly need God to help us to love. We tend to attach conditions to our love: if you...

If you like the things I like I can love you.

If you attend my church I can love you.

If you don't swear or smoke or get drunk I can love you.

If you don't stink I can love you.

If you ... (you can fill in the blanks. We all have our own boundaries)

Yet God loves unconditionally. While we were yet sinners is when Christ died for us. He accepts us as we are and loves us – and as we open up to his love we are changed more and more so that we start to live and act and love as Jesus did. It is not us trying harder, but it is God through the Holy Spirit working in us.

Finally, John says that “perfect love casts out fear.” (v. 18)

This is the result of love.

The context is a discussion about the day of judgement. If God's love dwells in us, because God lives in us, then we have nothing to fear at judgement day. We will know we are loved and accepted by God because we have let his love dwell in our hearts.

Too often we see God as angry and ready to punish our every misstep. We read in the Old Testament how whole cities were destroyed by God because of their wickedness and we shudder, because we know we are not doing so well at times. We too wrestle with sin.

So we feel like Adam in the Garden of Eden after he sinned, trying to hide from God, fearing his wrath. What God wants us to know is that we need not fear him in that sense. He came to rescue us out of love, we can be sure his love will be there on judgement day as well. Those who have said “yes” to God’s love, who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour and received forgiveness and new life through him need not fear judgment day.

In fact, John says we have confidence (v. 17). That confidence is not in ourselves but in the love of God.

This lack of fear should characterize God’s people not just on judgement day, but every day. In Luke 21:26 it says that in the last days the hearts of men will fail them because of fear, but that should not be Christians. God’s love casts out all fear. The God who is love is with us every step of the way, through every storm, through every trial. Knowing He is with us, and will watch over us, takes away all fear.

The thing I miss the most about having small children in the house is the opportunities to be the hero. Dad’s often get the chance to be the safe place, the protector, the hero of their children. No matter how bad things get, if the kids can put their hand into dad’s hand (or mom’s) they feel safe.

Tenting in Waterton National Park can be risky. Windstorms can suddenly whip through that valley and your tent and all your belongings can be blown away. Lise and I camped there one summer when the kids were small. We could see the storm coming across the lake, so we quickly put everything we could into our car, and then piled into the tent to hold it down. We no sooner got everyone into their sleeping bags when the wind hit – a 80-100km/hr wind that blew everything not tied down into the lake.

Fortunately our tent was protected just enough, and tied down just enough that it did not blow away. Instead, the wind flattened it. The fiberglass poles were no match for the wind, so the walls collapsed and the ceiling of the tent was now pressed into our faces. So dad to the rescue – I held the tent up with my arm, then my head through the night until the wind died down. At first the children were very much afraid. But when they saw mom and dad were there looking after them, they soon fell asleep, unafraid, despite the howling wind.

Love took away their fear. Mom and dad were there to protect them.

And because God is with us always, we need not fear.

There is one more consequence of allowing God’s love into our life mentioned here. We love others. “We love because he first loved us,” John says in verse 19. We can’t help it. His love is within us and overflows to others.

Yesterday our daughter and her husband (and our grand baby) arrived at their new home in Saskatoon. When they arrived, there was a team of people ready to help them unload their moving van. Before nightfall, everything was in the house and the beds were even set up. On the counter there was fresh fruit and cinnamon buns. Who would do this? These were people from the church. They did not know Amanda and Cole, so why did they do this?

That is what love does. They were family – part of the family of God.

So we end where we started, with a command, “And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must love their brother and sister.” (v. 21)

We can never list all the ways we can show love to one another, or to our neighbours, or to our community, but God’s people, filled with the Holy Spirit, will be led to show God’s love in many different ways. We do not wait for people to come to us. We are always looking outward for ways to show love to others.

This morning we are challenged by the call to be a people of love. “By this will all men know that you are my disciples: if you have love one for the other.” (John 13:35)

God gives the command, provides the resources through his own presence, and shapes our lives so we live without fear as we learn to love those around us.

This morning it is our prayer that God would make us a people who truly know how to love, not because we are trying harder, but because of Christ within us. As we learn to love as we are loved by God through Christ may others come to know the God and join us on this wonderful journey with God.