

1 John 4:7-21

By Our Love

In his book *Enjoying God*, Lloyd Ogilvie writes:

My formative years ingrained the quid pro quo into my attitude toward myself: *do and you'll receive; perform and you'll be loved*. When I got good grades, achieved, and was a success, I felt acceptance from my parents. My dad taught me to fish and hunt and worked hard to provide for us, but I rarely heard him say, "Lloyd, I love you." He tried to show it in actions, and sometimes I caught a twinkle of affirmation in his eyes. But I still felt empty.

When I became a Christian I immediately became so involved in discipleship activities that I did not experience the profound healing of the grace I talked about theoretically...

I'll never forget as long as I live the first time I really experienced healing grace. I was a postgraduate student at the University of Edinburgh. Because of financial pressures I had to accordion my studies into a shorter than usual period. Carrying a double load of classes was very demanding, and I was exhausted by the constant feeling of never quite measuring up. No matter how good my grades were, I thought they could be better. Sadly, I was not living the very truths I was studying. Although I could have told you that the Greek words for grace and joy are *charis* and *chara*, I was not experiencing them.

My beloved professor, Dr. James Stewart, that slightly built dynamo of a saint, saw into my soul with x-ray vision. One day in the corridor of New College he stopped me. He looked me in the eye intensely. Then he smiled warmly, took my coat lapels in his hands, drew me down to a few inches from his face, and said, "Dear boy, you are loved now!"

God loves us now, not when we get better. God loves us now, as we are. ¹

You may be able to relate to Mr. Ogilvie's story. So many people walk the face of the earth feeling like they don't measure up, that for some reason they are not lovable. And in truth I think that all of us have times when we feel like there is something that is not lovable about us, and that can make us fearful. It makes us fearful to be in relationship with others and fearful for others to be in relationship with us. When we feel or fear that

¹ Larson, Craig Brian. *Leadership Journal. 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preacher, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1993, 1996, 1998. 2002. Page 329-330.

someone has an agenda, that somehow their appearance or their way is off-putting or even scary, we find it difficult to love them.

Sometimes fear can make people downright ugly in how they treat others. They fear someone getting the best of them, or they have been hurt so badly by another that they lash out at everyone around them. This fear can extend to groups. There is more than enough hatred going around on the internet, on the news, and in lived experience, but hate comes from a place of fear. Fear of the other, fear that we will be hurt.

At times it can be change or transitions that make people fearful, and so they dig in, hold their position and try to force others to follow suit. It is done through coercion and manipulation. Their fear becomes the basis for break down in communication and trust.

Some people fear that they are not loving enough, even for God. They strive to be the best people they can be so that they are lovable enough for God and for others. But the writer of 1 John has this to say about any and all fear, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love cast out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love." (v18)

Even that is a difficult statement to understand, so let's unpack it a little. We heard that line about being perfected also in verse 12. "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us."

Now we already know that human beings are not perfect, yet what this is saying, well this and all the rest of the scripture that was read, is that because God loved us first...loved us with all our imperfections, troubles, challenges, and yes, sin, God love is perfected in us. This perfection comes in how we love others. You see our response to God's love is to love others. The more we love, the more we live our lives in the Spirit of Jesus and his example of love. The more we are perfected.

Something to note about this epistle of 1 John is that it was written to Christian community. It is about how we as Christians understand God's love and how to love one another. If you are getting a sense of déjà vu that is a good thing, it means that you recognize much of what I am saying you heard from me last week. The challenge of doing a series on 1 John is that the writer repeats himself, but that is also likely the point. We need to be reminded over and over again about God's love for us and how that love is perfected in our loving our neighbour.

The mark of Christian community is how we love one another. How we demonstrate our love for each other speaks volumes about what it means to be Christian. In the reading we also heard, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." (v7-8). To love means you know your value as a child of God, imperfections and all. God loves you right now. Not in some future time when you get it all together, not when you accomplish this thing or that. God loves you now and because of that we can love others just as they are, right now.

But how can we trust God's love for us? Again, this is a specifically Christian question. I will not try to answer it for everyone, but as Christians we know God's love for us in that, "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him." God sent Jesus, to live a fully human life, so that we could trust that God knows what we are experiencing. We know God's love through the Son whom God sent, Jesus. We know Jesus' story through scripture, and through Jesus we learn of how much we are loved by God.

Jesus was the gift that proved God's love for us once and for all time. We can trust it, live into it, and be perfected by God's love shown in how we love others. This is something we do as individuals but as the church it is imperative.

I remember many years ago sharing a story with an acquaintance about how I had hoped to see her mother after the passing of the husband, I never did it. The daughter said, well it's the thought that counts. That never sat well with me. I thought to myself, but if I never act on the thought how will anyone know that I really cared, that I wanted to show compassion and love?

The writer of 1 John is all about action, about following through with the thought by demonstrating our love. We make the invisible God known to others by our love. God makes himself visible in Christian love. As the church of St. Andrew's, as the broader call of being a follower of Christ in the world-wide church, we are to love one another because "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." (v16b). Those who love God are to love others. This is how the world will know God. The world will know God by our love. In community, in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.