
¹⁶ We know love by this, that He (Christ Jesus) laid down His life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷ How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? ¹⁸ Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before Him ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²² and we receive from Him whatever we ask, because we obey His commandments and do what pleases Him. ²³ And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He has commanded us. ²⁴ All who obey His commandments abide in Him, and He abides in them. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit that He has given us.

1 John 3:18-21 (NRSV)

Why are you here...? Why are you here...? This is a question we could answer in a multitude of ways... We are here today to ‘worship God’... But is that the only way we may answer this question? For some people, the question ‘Why am I here?’ may lead to deep and philosophical reflections. We may ponder our ‘purpose’ in life – why I am ‘here’. This, of course, may lead to unhealthy introspection which may manifest itself in a variety of ways (some of which we may reflect upon later). On the other hand, we may simply answer the question ‘Why am I here?’ with some obvious statements. “I was born, and so that’s why I am ‘here’.”

Why are you ‘here’? It is good sometimes to truly reflect on this question in a proper way. It is also good for congregations and the like to reflect also on this question. Why are we ‘here’? What is God calling us to ‘do’ and ‘be’ in this place? And, again, like the personal situation we may sometimes ‘overthink’ this question. We are ‘here’ because ‘history’ has brought us to this place. But the question of our ‘purpose’ and ‘being’ remains...

Why are you ‘here...?’

There is something very important in our Scripture Reading for in terms of ‘being’ and ‘relationship’...

The Apostle John, who was known as ‘the disciple Jesus loved (and who wrote this letter) had two great concerns among the many themes that ran throughout his letters and Gospel. The first is the revelation that Jesus Christ as the ‘revealer of God’. John begins his Gospel with the word, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John goes on to say (Jn 1:14): “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”

John affirms that Jesus is God among us. He begins his letter by saying, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.” Jesus is God among us. John wants people to know that Jesus’ ‘being’ is ‘God’, and if you want to know God you need to know Jesus.

The other great concern of John is that Jesus not only reveals Himself as God, He also commands those who believe in Him to love one another. The command of Jesus to “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn.13:34) is affirmed in John’s letters.

As people who know God’s great love in Jesus, we are called to ‘love one another’ (including our fellow believer). The Children of God are the ones who seek to do what is right so as to please God their Father. The Children of God seek to do what is right because of the sacrifice Jesus paid for us on the cross and we do not want to dishonour His sacrifice. We seek to do right because we want to do right for the one we love. And John brings together these themes of ‘faith’ and ‘love’ in our Reading for today (1 Jn.3:23): “And this is His command: (1) to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and (2) to love one another as He commanded us.”

These two themes (Jesus as God; and the command to love) helped shape the identity of the early church as they lived in a difficult and hostile world around it. This is a community that should do two things very well. True members of this community should believe in Jesus Christ as God’s own Son, the full revelation of God’s own self. And true members of this community should love one another. And the basis of this love for one another is God’s great love for us in Jesus, who gave His life as an atoning sacrifice for us.

This has two very practical applications in our life – in terms of ‘being’ and ‘relationship’.

First, we can live life with confidence and joy. Why? John reminds us about how great God’s love really is. We could ask the question “How great is it?” It is so great says John that we actually are called the children of God. We are family to God! We are God’s sons and daughters. We are His heritage. We are *His* heirs. We are Sons and Daughters to the King of Kings, The Lord of Lords, The Great I Am, The Creator of the Universe, the Alpha and Omega, and all the other royal titles that go with God.

This thought for many people today is not thought about very much. We have often ourselves forgotten who we are when we become the recipients of God’s Divine love and forgiveness. John reminds us we become the children of Almighty God! Your place is assured in the family of God because you are baptised ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’. You are a part of God’s family. And, as John says (1 John 3:24) “And by this we

know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that He has given us.” What an incredible honour and privilege!

The other practical application of John’s word is that as we remember Jesus’ call to ‘love one another’ – we know that we live under the grace and love of God that comes from Jesus.

Let’s face it – not every ‘home’ and ‘family’ is a ‘happy family’. When John is speaking about us as ‘little children’ (a term of endearment) and ‘beloved’ (the word here is *‘agapatoi’*) he is reminding us that *we are loved by God*. This is important – simply because we do not always show that love that we know God calls from us. Every home and family experiences problems and disputes. Every congregation also experiences problems and disputes. It’s true. Our hearts do condemn us. We fall short in so many things. We don’t always love as God’s children. The question, then, is ‘How shall we *love one another?*’

The answer is that this ‘love’ cannot always (and ever really truly) from within our own ‘selves’. There is another love: it is the love of God in Jesus. When guilt wells up in your soul and your heart threatens to evict you from God’s family, then remember this blessed truth: “God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.” God is bigger than anything that might condemn us. God assures us that wherever we have fallen behind in love, out of weakness, our faults and failures are covered with the blanket of Christ’s righteousness. God ‘abides in us’. He ‘rests within us’ with His love!

There is a fascinating division in this passage in the 3 ‘this is how we know’ statements: Verse 16 says, “This is how we know what love is...” Verse 19 says, “This is how we know we belong to the truth...” And Verse 24 says, “This is how we know that he lives in us...”

What does it mean to ‘love one another’...? Very often we think of love in terms of ‘emotion’ and ‘something we have to generate within ourselves’. But John reminds us ‘love comes from God’ (1 John 4:7).

The Christian faith is not mainly about what you can do for God, it’s first about what God has done for you. The Holy Spirit has made God’s heart known to us. God has wrapped you up in his heart. He has poured his love onto you. It is in this sense of confidence that we dare turn our hearts towards one another and strive to love again.

There’s a saying, “Home is where the heart is.” How true when it comes to God’s house. We have the very heart of Christ. Jesus’ love is perfect. And we are wrapped up in such a love. Jesus’ great love for us has made us children of God. God covers up our sins, and as a result, our hearts cannot condemn us. We can look to God with fresh confidence, knowing we are forgiven. And our hearts find peace in Jesus.

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The fact we are still here in this congregation is not of our design. If we were designing God's home, we'd put walls where there ought to be doors. We'd decorate it with our own trinkets and "feel-good" knickknacks. Yet, God tears down walls and remodels our lives according to His heart. God's home is where His heart is. It's designed around His forgiveness. God's 'church' is built on the foundation of His Word.

The two commandments for faith and for love are identified as one in verse 23. Love for others is the core of Jesus revelation of the Father. And so such faith and love is the very essence of what we believe – 'why we are 'here'. Faith and love are the marks of the church. 'Faith' and 'love' are both the calling and the comfort of the church. They are in fact nothing less than what it means to dwell within the life of the Father and the Son, brought to reality and witnessed to by the Holy Spirit. Thank God for the gift of salvation and the love He pours out on us each and every day. Amen.